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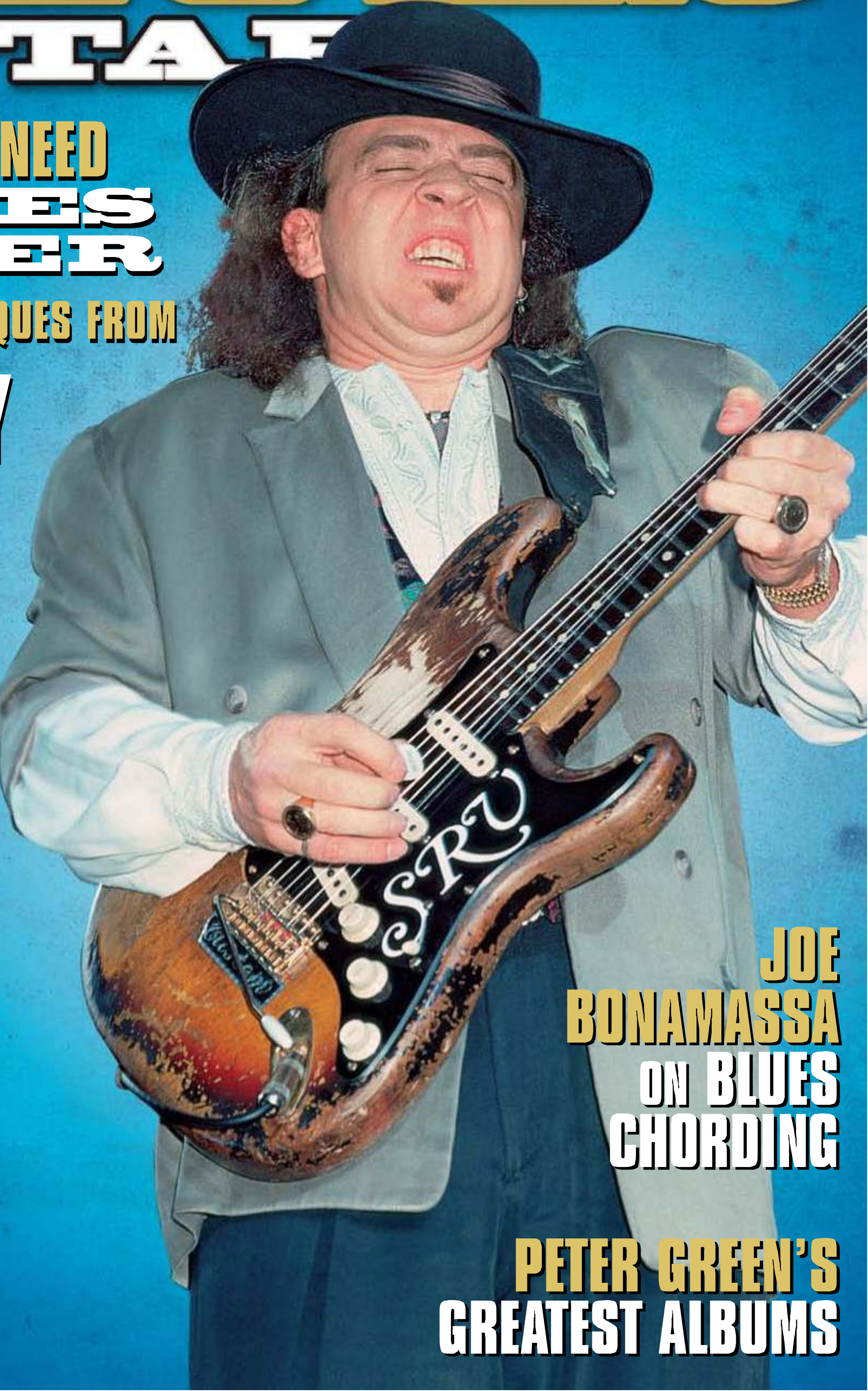

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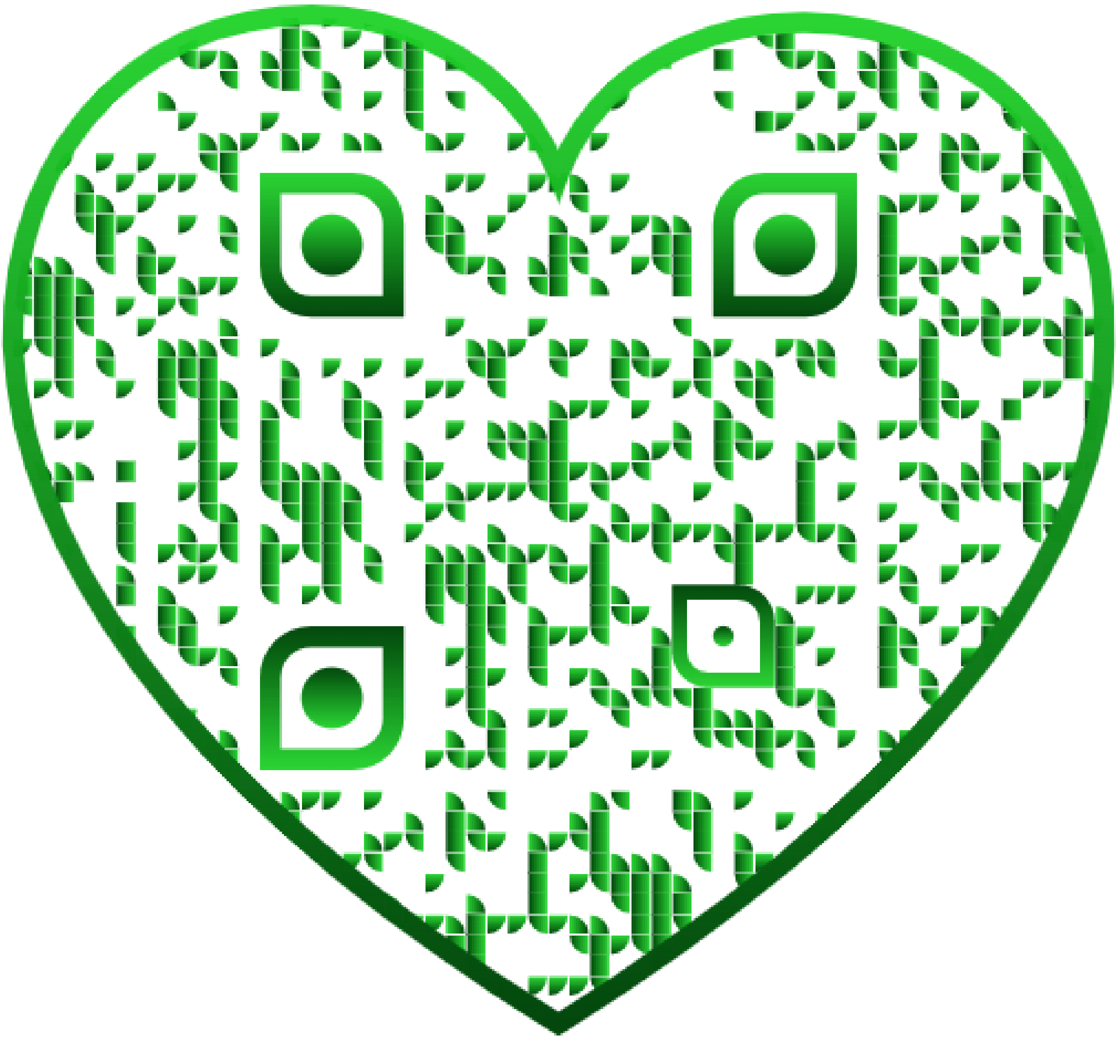

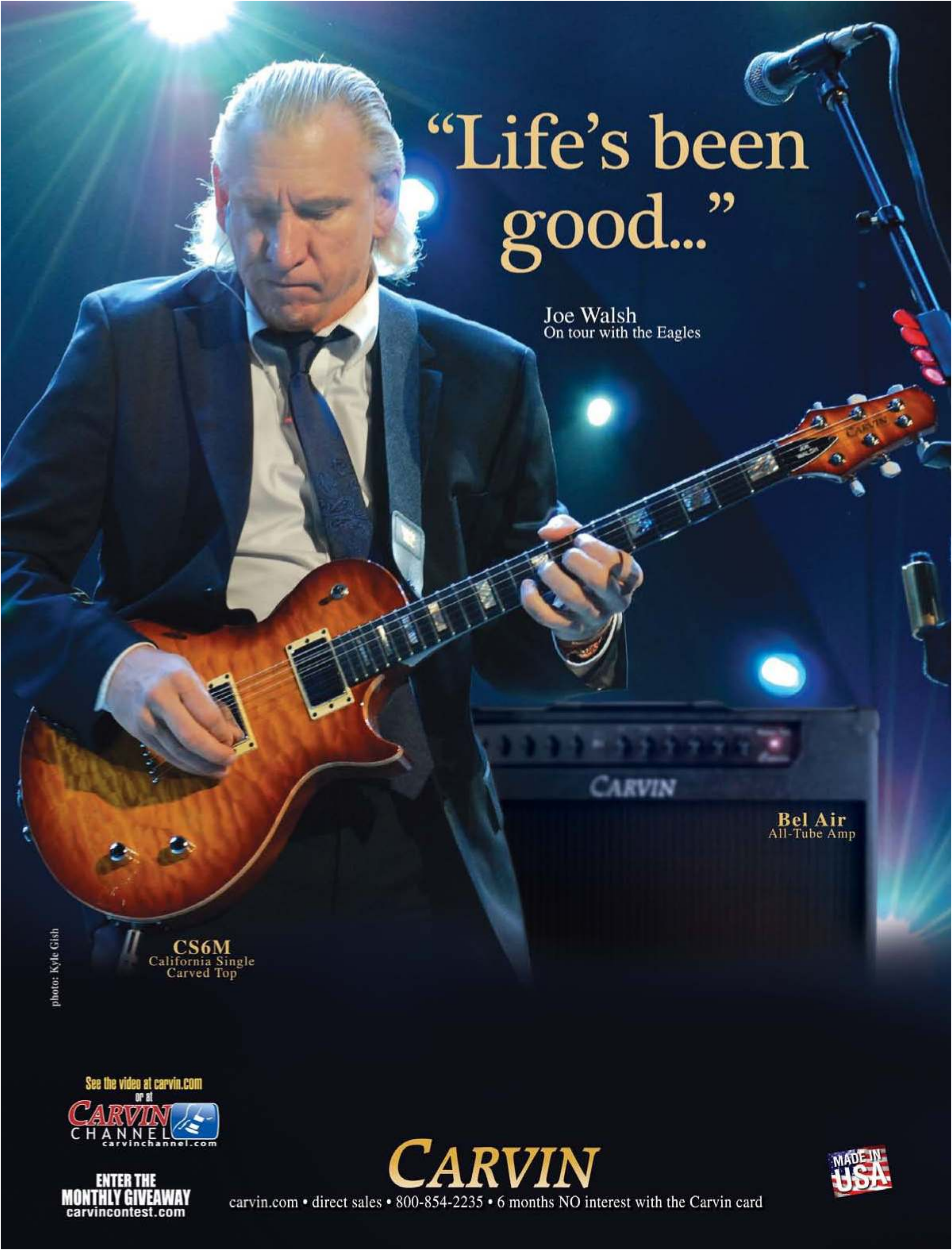

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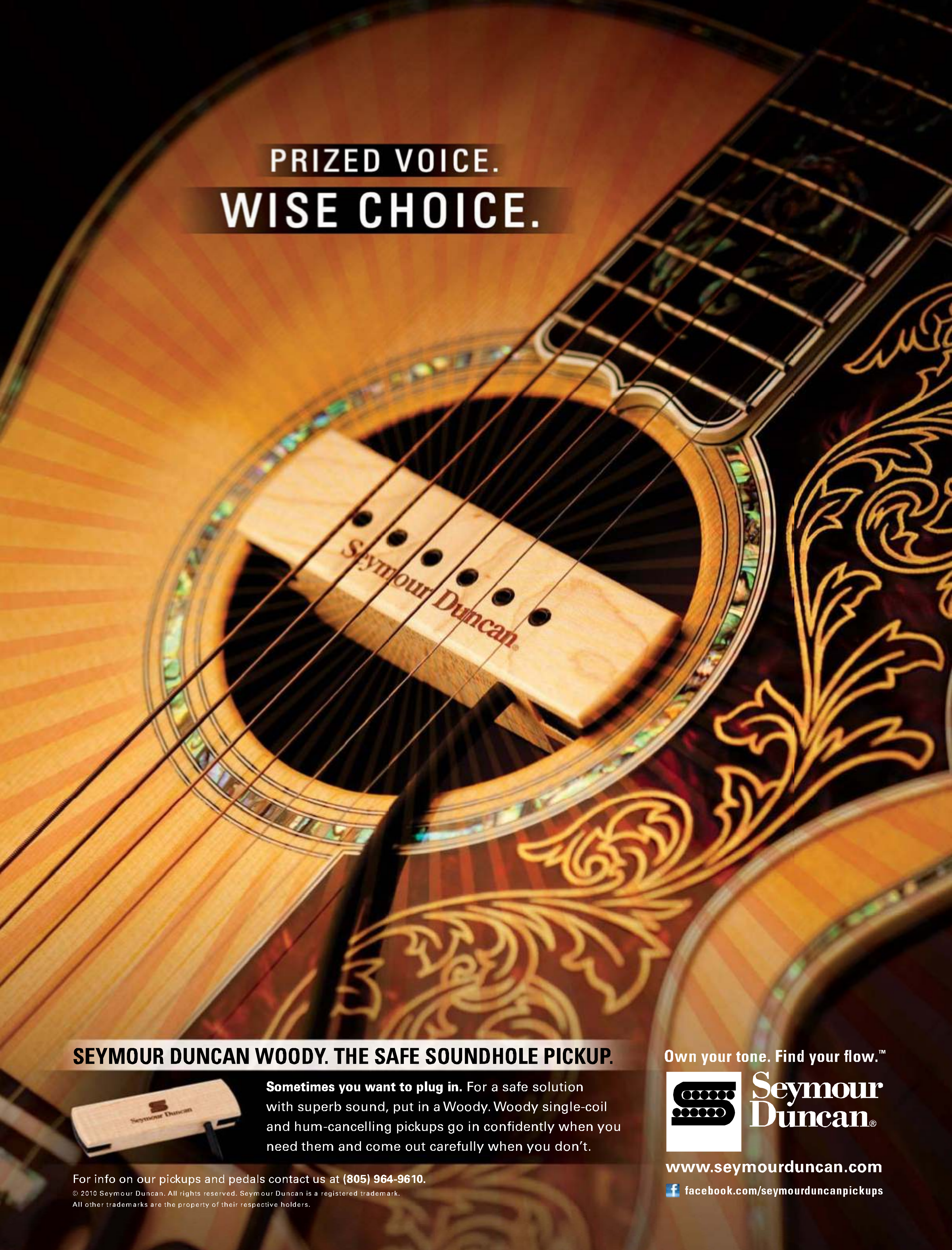
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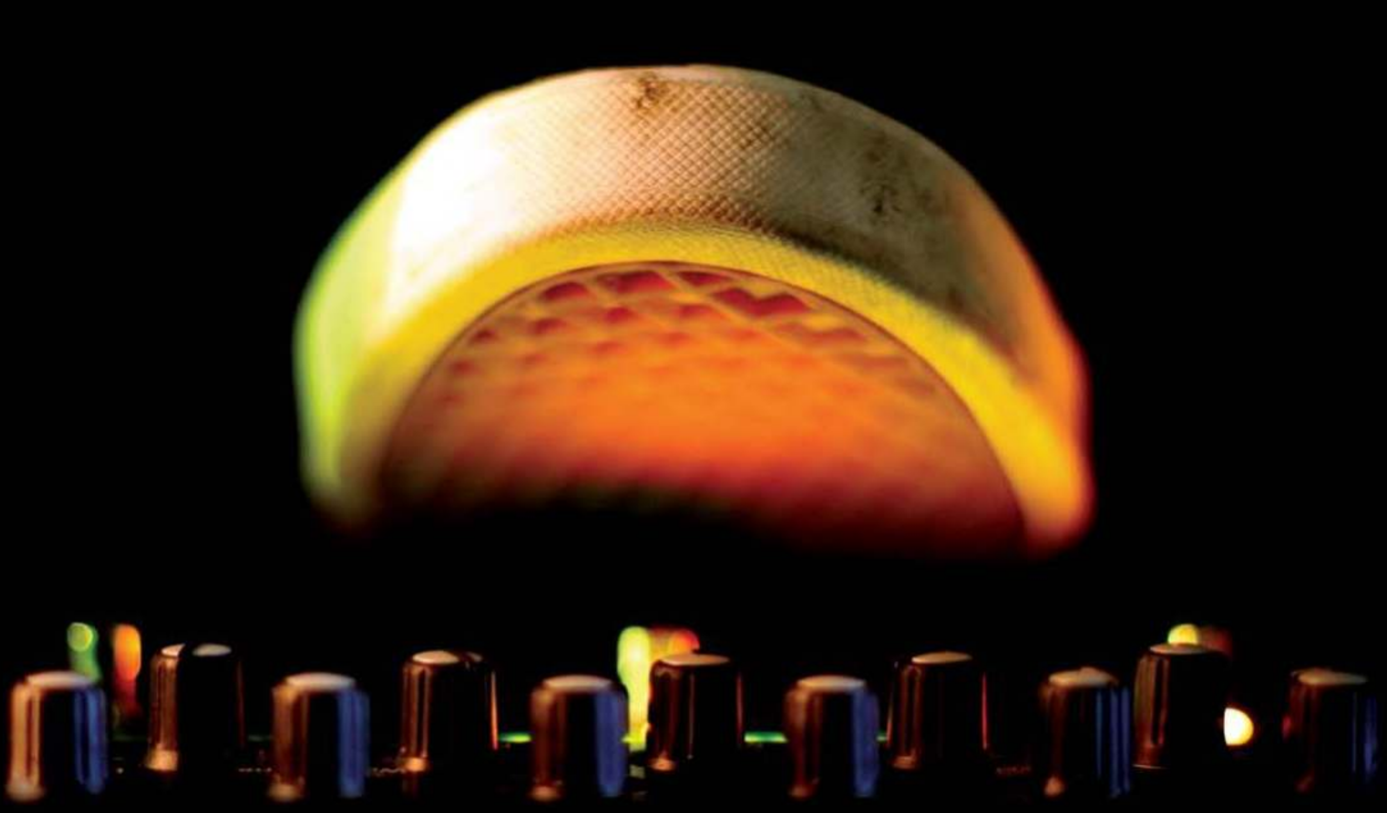

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Contents

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ARTIST FEATURES

06 **FREDDIE KING**
12 **PETER GREEN**
14 **ERIC CLAPTON**
20 **BUDDY GUY**
28 **STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN**

LESSONS

36 **ROBBEN FORD** on Five-Note Freedom
37 **ROBBEN FORD** on Talking Guitar
38 **NINE MAGICAL BLUES LICKS FROM ERIC CLAPTON AND B.B. KING**
46 **ROBBEN FORD** on Snappy, Sliding Double Bends
48 **ROBBEN FORD** on That Cool Four-Against-Three Sound
50 **GREG KOCH** on Devilish Blues Licks
52 **ROBBEN FORD** on Simple Secrets of the Symmetrical Scale
54 **PULL OFF POWER**
56 **ROBBEN FORD** on Symmetrical Splashes
57 **ROBBEN FORD** on A New Shade of Blue
58 **SPICING UP THE 12-BAR FORM**
60 **WHAT YOU GOTTA DO TO PLAY LIKE B.B. KING**
66 **JOE BONAMASSA** on Non-Boring Blues Chording

Freddie King

Patron Saint

BY DARRIN FOX

FROM T-BONE WALKER'S FLAMBOYANT rewrite of modern electric guitar to Stevie Ray Vaughan's authoritative mix of Hendrix and Albert King, Texas sports a hell of a knack for churning out fiery bluesmen that were not only trendsetters, but larger-than-life figures. And no Texas guitarist typified this more than Freddie King. Before his untimely death in 1976, at the age of 42, King not only scored a string of hits with some of the coolest guitar instrumentals ever, but his influence on a generation of British blues hounds was so significant that his stamp on modern blues/rock guitar remains obvious to this day.

Freddy Christian was born in Gilmer, Texas, on September 3, 1934. Christian changed his surname to King when he was 16, but the reasons for the switch differ depending upon whom you ask. (He also changed "Freddy" to "Freddie" in the late '60s for even more mysterious reasons.) King's half-brother and longtime bassist, Benny Turner, remembers King's first guitar as, "some type of Roy Rogers model" he had purchased with money earned from picking cotton. It was during these formative years that King heard the man who was to be one of his largest musical influences—jump jazzman and alto player extraordinaire, Louis Jordan.

"I remember him telling me Louis Jordan was his idol," King's daughter Wanda related to *GP* in 1995. "He would listen to him on the radio and try to match Louis' blowing with fingerings on the guitar."

Jordan's style—which also had a major impact on B.B. King—strongly influenced King's playing throughout his life, as evidenced in his squawking tone, and a swinging lyricism that relied heavily on the sweet and sour mixture of major/minor blues licks.

HIGH RISE

In the winter of 1949, when King was 16, his father uprooted the family and split the Lone Star State. Destination, Chicago. As a teenager cutting his teeth on the guitar, what better place could the young Texan have wound up than smack dab in the middle of Chicago's blues boom? King later related that Muddy Waters would personally sneak him into the local clubs. It was during this time that King got ahold of a Kay electric and began to glean tips from some of the scene's guitarists. Those players were a veritable who's-who of Chicago blues masters, including Robert Lockwood Jr., Eddie Taylor, and Muddy Waters' co-guitarist, Jimmy Rodgers. In fact, it was Rodgers who turned King onto the thumb/index-finger picking style he would employ the rest of his life. Instead of playing with his bare fingers, however, King used a plastic thumbpick and a steel fingerpick, which no doubt contributed to his ultra-keening tone.

King worked the rough-and-tumble

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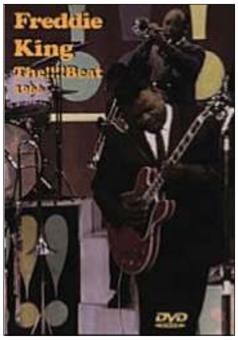

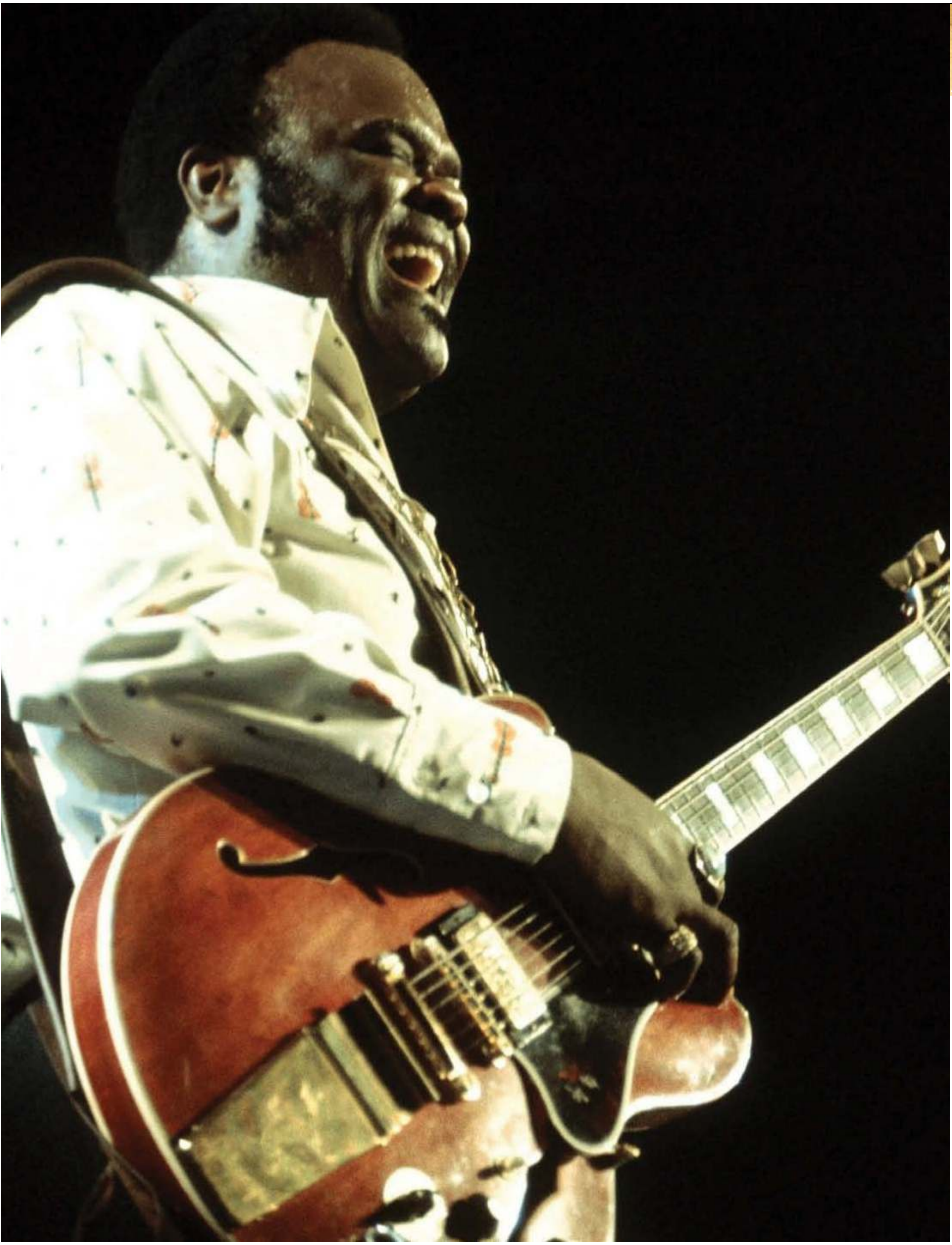

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FREDDIE KING continued

Chicago bars for the next few years, as he strove to make a name for himself. He would trade licks with fellow West Siders such as Magic Sam and Earl Hooker, before eventually recording his first single, "Country Boy," for the tiny El-Bee label. By that time, King had acquired a Gibson goldtop, the instrument he used to record some of his most important hits. After a failed audition for *the* blues label at the time, Chess, King signed a deal with Cincinnati's King Records. On August 26, 1960, the 25-year-old King recorded two of his most popular tracks: "Have You Ever Loved a Woman," and the classic instrumental "Hide Away," which reached number 29 on the pop charts in 1961, and number five on the *Billboard* R&B chart.

JUST PICKIN'

Although King was a mesmerizing vocalist—every bit as soulful as B.B. King or Little Milton—it was his snazzy guitar instrumentals that knocked audiences upside their collective heads. His King Records sides, such as "Side Tracked" and "San-Ho-Zay," were not only danceable, they rocked with funky, rough-necked riffing and positively *electric* soloing—a potent combination that kept King and his band busy. Turner reminisced to *GP* that the incessant touring during this time was a blur of frat-house blowouts, private parties, weddings, and the always- rugged Chitlin' Circuit.

Although he was a bluesman through-and-through, and he paid the majority of his dues in Chicago, King's music wasn't really Chicago blues. His sound didn't have the feral, one-foot-in-the-Mississippi-Delta moan that Muddy Waters or Howling Wolf threw down. Rather, King's thing swang with a raucous, good-time energy that was primarily due to his formative years in Texas.

Hits aside, nothing should take away from King's 6-string mastery, which, by the time the late '60s rolled around, was absolutely *burning*. His economical phrasing, stinging vibrato, and lyrical lines were lifted lock, stock, and barrel by Eric Clapton. Listen to E.C.'s soloing with the Yardbirds—as well with John Mayall on the seminal *Bluesbreaker's* album—for proof. To this day, whenever Slowhand digs into the blues, the echoes of Freddie King are undeniable.

King was let go by King Records in 1967, but he continued to gig tirelessly back in Texas, and all over the Southwest. He eventually landed with the Cotillion label, and produced two superb records: *Freddie King Is a Blues Master* and *My Feeling for the Blues*.

Eventually, King was dropped from Cotillion, but his influence was reaching critical mass across the pond in England. Clapton had already reached superstar status with Cream, and he was name-checking King constantly. And, by that time, Slowhand's replacements in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers—Peter Green, and, later, Mick Taylor—

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FREDDIE KING continued

were burning through their own versions of bad-ass King material such as "The Stumble" and "Driving Sideways."

SEN-SA-SHUN

Clearly the time was right for King to tour England. According to his daughter, when her father eventually returned to the States after a series of 1969 U.K. dates, one thing had obviously changed. "When he first went over there, he was still wearing that pompadour," she says. "But when he came back, he was wearing his hair natural, and that shocked the heck out of us! I said, 'My God, my father has gone black!'"

Clearly, King had been influenced by what was happening in swinging London. And like the men with whom he shared a royal surname—B.B. and Albert—his career was about to take off as a whole new generation of fans discovered the blues pioneers who had influenced bands such as the Rolling Stones and Cream. Working what he lovingly termed "the Fillmore circuit," King wowed blues and rock audiences with his command of the stage, as he brought songs down to a whisper, only to later erupt with a searing barrage of licks brimming with intensity.

"Those young white kids started people looking at me, B.B. King, and the rest," King told *GP* in 1977. "If it wasn't for them, the blues would still be in the same old black market. But now, it's a *bigger* market."

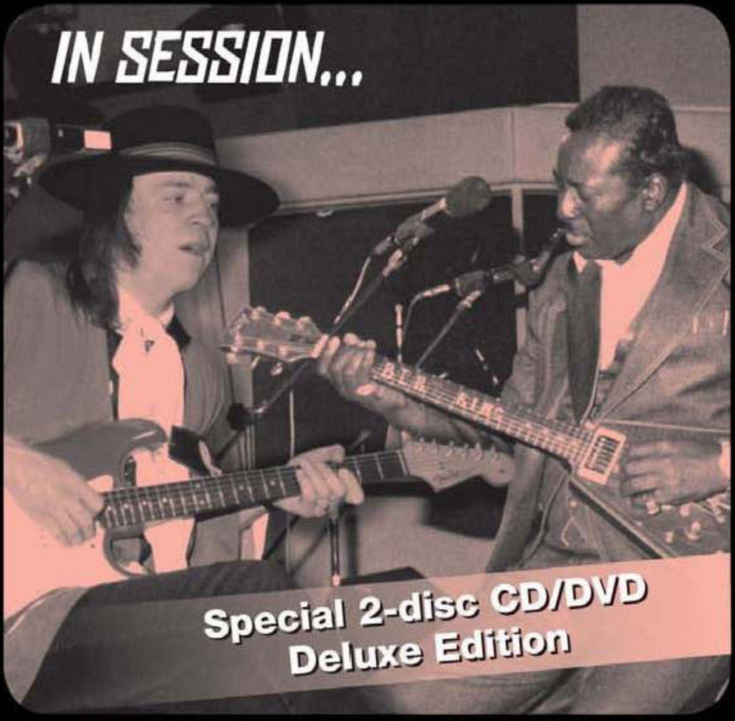
King signed with Shelter in 1970, at which time he recorded three records—*Getting Ready*, *Texas Cannonball*, and *Woman Across the River*—wherein his sound took on a decidedly funkier approach that was as greasy as it was contemporary. That's not surprising, of course, as King was still a relatively young man of 36—hardly a crotchety old bluesman. According to Lee King, Freddie's second cousin and co-guitarist during the early Shelter days, Freddie was eager to keep growing artistically rather than being labeled a "blues relic."

"The Shelter people expected Freddie to have a band full of senior citizens," he told *GP* in 1995. "They were shocked when he hit the road with some cats who could *rock and roll*." Ultimately King ended up opening for Creedence Clearwater Revival and Grand Funk Railroad—all without compromising his blues cred.

CHRISTMAS TEARS

Now, King was riding high. He signed with RSO—which was also Eric Clapton's label—and recorded two albums: 1974's *Burglar*, which featured Clapton on some cuts, and 1975's *Larger Than Life*. He was also playing prestigious venues such as London's Crystal Palace Bowl. But in an all-too-familiar script, years of hard touring caught up with King. His last show was in Dallas' New York Ballroom on Christmas night, 1976. Three days later, King died of liver failure.

ALBERT KING WITH STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN



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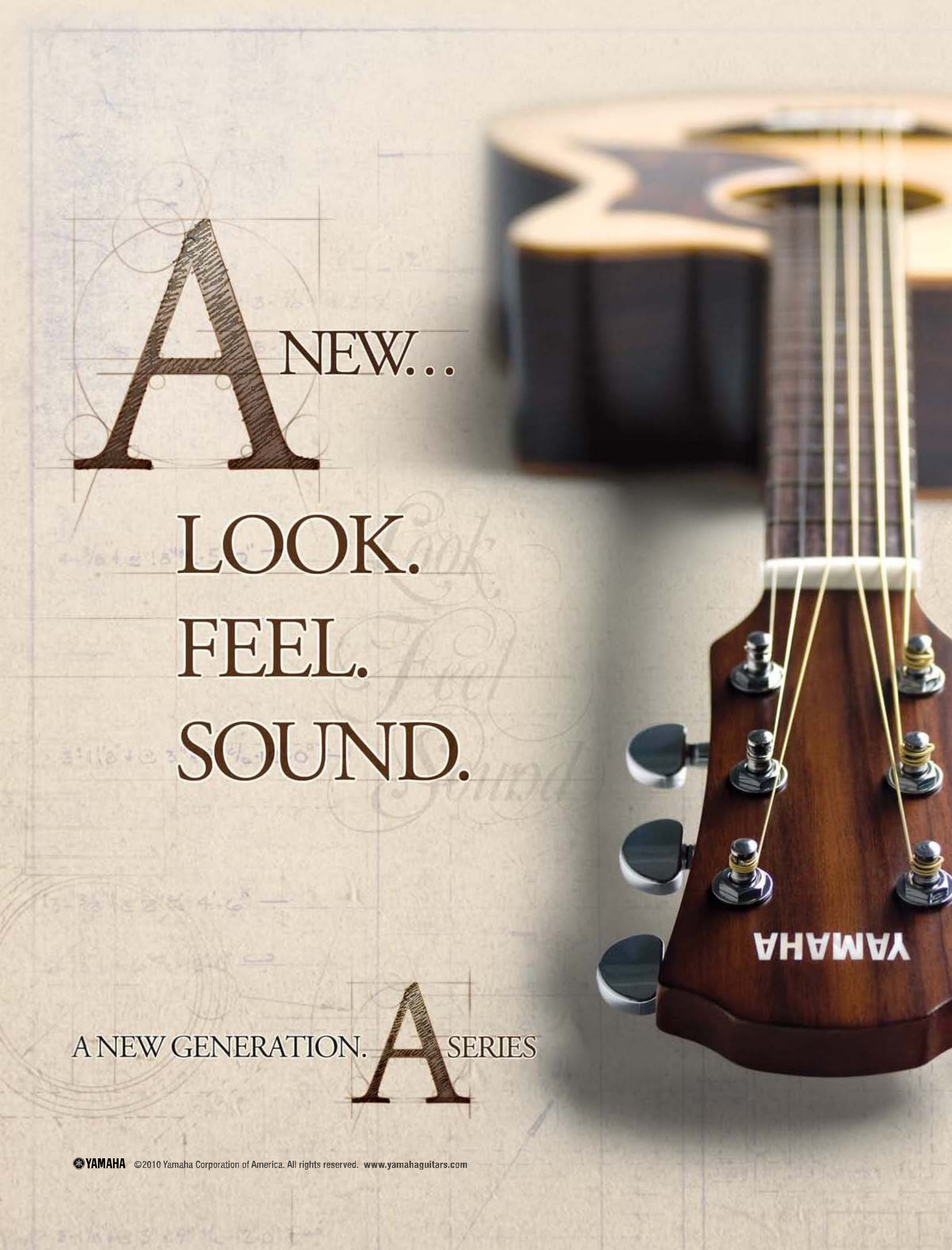

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Peter Green

Quevre Easy

BY ANDY ELLIS

WIDELY HAILED AS BRITAIN'S BEST-ever blues guitarist, Peter Green inspired B.B. King to say, "He has the sweetest tone I ever heard. He's the only one who gave me the cold sweats." Born Peter Greenbaum in 1946, the Londoner made his musical debut in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, replacing Eric Clapton (who had left to form Cream) as the band's lead guitarist in 1966. Green's unique style blended Hank Marvin's reverb-drenched twang and B.B. King's hornlike phrasing. After leaving the Bluesbreakers to found Fleetwood Mac (originally a rootsy blues-rock outfit), Green built up a devoted following with his throaty tones and deft fretwork. In 1971, psychedelic drugs and life on the road took their toll, pushing Green into debilitating mental illness. In the ensuing decades, he recorded a handful of solo and band albums, none of which adequately reflected his former glory.

INSPIRED

A Hard Road, 1967
This was the only album Green recorded with the Bluesbreakers, but it served to establish him as a worthy successor to Clapton. In addition to tracking a lively version of Freddie King's "The Stumble," Green cut a second instrumental, "The Supernatural." Featuring long, singing, feedback-driven notes, the tune established Green as a master of Les Paul tone.

7936 South Rhodes, 1968
Green served up some of the tastiest licks of his career backing Chicago blues pianist Eddie Boyd on this album. Compared to the howling textures that normally characterize Green's solos, the tones here are quiet, clear, and shimmering. Green's lines are so sweet and soulful it's easy to ignore the plodding bass and drums (provided by John McVie and Mick Fleetwood—Fleetwood Mac's rhythm section).

The Biggest Thing Since Colossus, 1969
Having played piano for many years with Muddy Waters, the late Otis Spann knew great guitar when he heard it. When Fleetwood Mac trekked to Chicago's Chess Records in '69 to record with some of their African-American heroes (including Spann), the sessions went so well the piano legend drafted Green, Danny Kirwan (Fleetwood Mac's second lead guitarist and Green protégé), and bassist McVie to join him and master blues drummer S.P. Leary in the studio. Green and Kirwan play beautiful lines—sometimes in harmony—and the groove is solid throughout. A superb example of "fathers-and-sons" blues, this album successfully merges the sounds of Chicago and London.

The Complete Blue Horizon Sessions: 1967-1969
The six-disc box set includes virtually everything Green and the original edition of Fleetwood Mac recorded for the British Blue Horizon label during the band's first years. This includes *Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac* ('68), *Mr. Wonderful* ('68), the 1969 release *English Rose* (which offered Green's "Black Magic Woman" and the haunting instrumental, "Albatross"), the compilation *Pious Bird of Good Omen* ('69), and the double LP *Blues Jam in Chicago*, as well as loads of false starts, band banter, and general studio chaos. Many of the tracks feature Jeremy Spencer and his derivative Elmore James-inspired slide. However, Green's squawky solos and hip phrases (played on his legendary '59 sunburst Les Paul with its phasoidal dual-pickup timbres) more than make up for Spencer's shenanigans. For Green freaks, this is *the* treasure trove of tone. Well worth the box-set buckage.

REQUIRED

Then Play On, 1969
This is the last Fleetwood Mac album to feature Green. He and Kirwan provide some ferocious dueling guitars ("Searching for Madge" and "Fighting for Madge") and beautiful guitar harmony ("Coming Your Way"). The album also contains two of Green's most memorable songs—"Oh Well" and "Rattlesnake Shake."

Live at the Boston Tea Party, Part One-Three, 1970
Recorded during a weekend residency at Beantown's fabled rock hall, the performances on this three-disc set capture Green's mojo at its peak. Soon after, he would spiral into mental illness and his playing would no longer have the power evidenced so clearly here. The albums are also available

JAN PERSSON/REDFERNS/RETNA

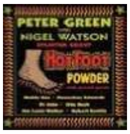
individually, so if you're not a completist start with *Part One*, which contains the classics "Black Magic Woman," "Jumping at Shadows," "Rattlesnake Shake," and "The Green Manalishi." (Green allegedly wrote the latter after a bad acid trip.) The three discs include Spencer's questionable slide songs and some supremely irritating doo-wop featuring Earl Vance (Spencer's Elvis-impersonating alter-ego), but when Green and Kirwan dig into their guitars, as in the 25-minute version of "Rattlesnake Shake" on *Part Two*, the riffage is transcendent.

Shrine '69, 1969
Green's cutting, feedback-drenched bends and dynamic phrasing are in full force on this live album, which was recorded when Fleetwood Mac opened for the Mothers of Invention in L.A. There are moments where Green plays like a man possessed, and his Les Paul tone on "Rollin' Man," "If You Be My Baby," "Albatross," and "Need Your Love So Bad" could change your life. The album's emotional wallop compensates for some occasionally iffy audio quality.

TIRED

Live at the BBC, 1967-1971
This mix of oldie parodies, blues, and wacko rockabilly illustrates how the early Fleetwood Mac could be both brilliant and irksome. Green sneaks in a few cool licks, but most of the performances on this two-disc set are lackluster.

The Robert Johnson Songbook, 1998
Though listenable, this collection of Robert Johnson covers lacks the passion of the bluesman's originals or Green's best work.



Hot Foot Powder, 2000
Backed by Nigel Watson and the Splinter Group, Green returns to Robert Johnson's catalog to record the remaining songs that didn't make it onto *Songbook*. Despite guest appearances by Buddy Guy, Otis Rush, and Hubert Sumlin, this is not a fiery guitar album.

Right Here Right Now

Eric Clapton Still Loves the Blues, But He's Not Chained to Them

BY DARRIN FOX

MEETING ERIC CLAPTON IS LIKE meeting the President of the United States. Although you may not agree with everything he does, you'd be hard pressed to find a more powerful and influential figure. Clapton has always been rock-guitar royalty—from his early days with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers (where he virtually rewrote blues/rock guitar) to his latter-day chart successes. n On his new record, *Reptile* [Warner Bros.], Clapton revisits a soulful, organic sound that should appease fans who were disappointed with the relative tameness of his last solo effort, *Pilgrim*. Using much of the band he worked with on last year's B.B. King collaboration, *Riding with the King* (which includes Nathan East on bass and Steve Gadd on drums), Clapton turns in a collection of blues ("Got You on My Mind"), soul (Ray Charles' "Come Back Baby"), pop ("Modern Girl"), and the laid-back samba of the record's title track.

For someone who has had such an enormous impact on rock guitar, Clapton comes off as a humble man who simply makes music he enjoys. For his first *GP* interview since 1985, I met up with Clapton in Birmingham, England, before a concert run. Wearing worn-out jeans, tennis shoes, and a black T-shirt with "supreme" written on it, the 56-year-old guitarist looked amazingly fit and exuded a youthful vitality—especially when he talked about blues records that turn him on, or the new music that's influencing him.

• • • • •

A lot of your fans will be surprised by the samba feel and jazzy tone of the album's title track.

Last year, I had a chance to see João Gilberto perform in Brazil. Someone told me that was a rare occurrence—he's very eccentric and unreliable, so you'll be lucky to see him once in your lifetime. So I thought that was a blessing. He played for a long time—maybe three hours—and he didn't speak or acknowledge the audience at all. He just sat on a stool with his lyrics all over the floor and performed so perfectly that it was frightening. Seeing him had a profound effect on me, so I think "Reptile" represents where I want to go next.

Playing over a samba groove didn't feel strange to you?

There's something about flamenco and samba music that has a blues feel to me. That makes it easy for me to slip into.

What guitar did you cut that track with?

I used a Gibson L-5. I just love that tone. The sound and phrasing on "Reptile" comes a bit from Gilberto and a bit from B.B. King—that woolly tone he'll occasionally use. I wanted that guitar to personify the album, so I put it all over the record.

Do you see yourself delving deeper into other musical styles?

Possibly. I'd like to visit more mellow and subtle musical areas. I'd really love to do a semi-jazz project. Not really jazz, but maybe standards—like when we did "Come Rain or Come Shine" on *Riding with the King*. There are a lot of standards I'd like to approach with a jazz/blues feel.

Did you expect the tremendous success of Riding with the King*?*

I knew there were a lot of people waiting for B.B. and me to do something together. But, to be honest, the record did better than I thought it would.

Did the experience of Riding with the King *affect* Reptile*?*

TERRY O'NEILL

ERIC CLAPTON continued

For both albums, the goal was to try to record as live as possible, and to have a lot of musicians playing very minimally—all performing tiny parts that weave the music together like a fabric.

Do you get the same charge out of the blues now as you did when you were 15?

Yes. The blues has a strong home-base feel to me. At the moment, we only delve into the blues a few times in the live set. We do "Hoochie Coochie Man," "Five Long Years," and "Have You Ever Loved a Woman?" When we get to the second tune, I either settle in, or I don't—it depends where my head is at. Sometimes I just can't find it. The blues is really difficult because it requires complete commitment. I really have to focus myself. If I can manage to do that, it's usually the highlight of the gig.

How do you get in that head space in the studio?

You have to make the recording process a live experience. It's very rare that I'll overdub a solo—I find that very difficult. Most of the solos I record are when I'm playing with the band, and they're usually first or second takes. "Come Back Baby," for example, was a first take.

That tune brings out a lot of the Buddy Guy influence in your playing—the crazy overbending and wild phrasing.

We covered a lot of different musical areas on *Reptile*, but when I hit the blues territory, all of this pent-up emotion came out. The feelings came rushing through—almost overpowering me. I think that's how that crazier style manifests itself.

Do you still enjoy touring?

The physical price of touring is very high, but it's worth it when the band gets onstage and the musical chemistry happens. That's why I do it. When it's not right onstage, *then* you're in trouble. You're paying the price, but not getting anything back.

Do you ever hear a song from your past—say a Yardbirds or Bluesbreakers tune—and say, "Wow, where did that *come from?"*

Of course. I don't hear my old stuff very often though, and I don't go into my record collection and pull out my old albums. I imagine the John Mayall stuff would be quite a jump to listen to—because it was so long ago and I'm convinced that the music is pretty powerful stuff—but I don't go out of my way to research my past.

How would you describe your evolution as a player from the Yardbirds to now?

Most of my development has been the realization that I don't need to be a genius—that I can actually learn songs my own way. For example, I was sitting around one day, and I figured out an arrangement of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." I found the chords I needed to get the tune out, and I assumed they were correct. Well, in fact, they're not—they're *my* chords and it's my version of the song. But I think that's a legitimate way of learning—self-educated theory.

What did it take to get to that point?

I gained confidence in my own musical intuition. All the time that I knew I could play blues, I was still very insecure about my standing as a legitimate musician. I didn't feel I could sit and have a conversation with a jazz player about music because they were on a higher level than me. Yet I've found over the last few years that I can approach any kind of music and bring a unique point of view to it. For example, when I toured with the Legends Band—which included Joe Sample, Marcus Miller, David Sanborn, and Steve Gadd—I thought I wasn't worthy to play with them. But even though I felt I wasn't in their league, when we talked about music I realized, "Hey, I *do* know enough to stand alongside these guys and play."

Do you prefer the studio or the stage?

Ideally, the two should be almost the same thing. What I like to do when I'm recording is play like I'm onstage. However, we recorded *Pilgrim* on Pro Tools, and I found working like that too abstract. It was very difficult to master, because it was just me and my partner Simon Climie and the choices were *endless*. That record took a year and a half to make. You tend to try to attain perfection, because you feel you *can*. "River of Tears," for example, took three weeks to record, because I would redo the guitar part over and over. You don't lose any of the previous takes, so why not? That's a legitimate way to record, but, for me, it's self-defeating.

But Pro Tools does make arranging songs easier because you can move parts around.

Yeah, but it's almost like having false boobs [*laughs*]. It's not quite right, because the part doesn't really belong where it is. Working with Pro Tools is a cerebral way of making music—it's like trying to put a square peg in a round hole. Simon is a genius at that stuff. He can construct a solo from a bunch of different takes, and I'll listen to it and say, "That's really good." But in my heart, I don't quite believe it. I admire it, but I don't believe it.

Do you see yourself reverting to more old-

DOYLE BRAMHALL II ON COWRITING "SUPERMAN INSIDE"

"The opportunity to write a song with Eric Clapton came about while I was working with him on *Riding with the King*," says Doyle Bramhall II, who wrote "Marry You" and "I Wanna Be" for the album. "When we finished the record, Eric asked me to play on *Reptile*, and while we were recording he asked me if I had a song. I played him the idea I had for 'Superman Inside.' He took the song to London to finish recording it, and he came up with a really great slide part for the chorus. It was wonderful to be able to go back and forth playing guitar and singing with Eric!"

MANNING GOD'S GEAR

Lee Dickson has been Clapton's guitar tech since 1979. Here, he details his employer's various gear evolutions. —*DF*

"Eric recorded *Reptile* with the same setup he has been using the past few years—his signature Strats plugged into a copy of a '58 Twin Fender tweed," explains Dickson. "The stock guitars are outfitted with Fender Noiseless single-coils and a TBX tone circuit, which provides 21dB of midrange boost. The only other electric he used was a '55 Gibson L-5. For acoustics, Eric used a Martin 000-4 ECB prototype for steel-string parts, and a Herendino nylon-string—which is his favorite guitar at the moment.

"Eric's amps have been worked on by various people over the years—including the guys at the Fender Custom Shop. The last incarnation was tweaked by John Suhr. For speakers, he uses a combination of Mojotones and Eminence-designed Fender speakers.

"Live, Eric plugs his guitars into a Dunlop CryBaby, a Demeter Tremulator, and an A/B/Y box that allows him to choose the Twin, a Leslie speaker cab powered by a Marshall JCM 800, or both. I change the strings before every show with an Ernie Ball .009-.042 set. His onstage acoustic is a Martin 000-28 strung with Martin .012-.054s. He runs the Martin's stock piezo pickup into a direct box. Recently, he has felt the piezo sound is too harsh in the treble frequencies, so we've been using a combination of the piezo and an AKG C460 mic.

"I never know what to make of an audience," says Clapton, "because there's always a certain level of politeness. They're going to clap anyway, so you don't know if they really like something or if they're just being nice."

"Eric has adopted a less-is-more philosophy toward gear over the last decade or so. When I first started working for him, he was using Music Man stuff—130 heads through open-back cabs loaded with JBL K-120s. After that, there was a short period when he used Dean Markley amps. He also phased out the Leslie in favor of various chorus pedals. When he went on the road with Roger Waters for the *Pros and Cons of Hitchhiking* tour, he entered a Marshall phase and began using JCM 800s. Then there was a Soldano period. The only time Eric went crazy with effects—and it was mostly my doing—was when he had a Bradshaw rig, and, later, a Pete Cornish-built rack. It was insane for him to have all that stuff, because all he used was a Dytronics Tri-Stereo chorus.

"There's nothing worse in this job than repetition, so, thankfully, Eric always has the element of surprise in his playing. He plays differently every night. Where I really saw Eric's genius was during the *From the Cradle* tour. Although I had worked for him a long time by then, I was blown away by his ability to do an Elmore James tune and sound like Elmore, and then do a Freddie King number and sound like Freddie. He would morph into the style of his heroes and *nail* them. It was incredible. To hear him play like that made the hair on the back of my neck stand up—and I used to stand there as a fan watching Cream!"

ERIC CLAPTON continued

school recording techniques?

I would like to take myself, a rhythm section, and one reel of tape, and make an entire album in a day. That used to be possible. Cream recorded *Disraeli Gears* over a weekend, and I recorded *Unplugged* in an evening, so I know it can be done.

Your tones over the past couple of years have gotten rawer and more immediate.

It may be a reflection of me and my way of looking at life. More economical and direct.

How do you cast guitars for songs?

I go for what I think is right, but I'm often wrong. In that case, I just do an about face. A lot of the time the best stuff is accidental. The guys I work with in the studio know to keep the tape running, because I play the best stuff when I don't know I'm recording and I'm just noodling. If I get an idea and say, "Okay, roll tape," I usually don't get it quite right.

What stage of your career would you like to revisit?

Without a doubt, I would like to go back to the beginning of the '60s, before I was a professional. That was a time when I would wander around London, hang out in pubs and clubs, and study other musicians. Local players were very influential to me.

When you changed from Gibsons to Fenders, was your style already changing, or did switching guitars have an effect on your playing?

I think the guitar dictated the way I played to a certain extent. Because the Strat has less sustain—it's harder to bend on and harder to hold the bends and apply vibrato—I play more notes.

Was it a conscious decision to get away from the Gibson/Marshall combination?

I didn't look at the change as "I'm done with that." It was more a case of wanting to try something else. The Strat thing came almost directly from hearing *Hoodoo Man Blues* by Junior Wells with Buddy Guy. You could really hear the Strat. It was so immediate. You heard the sound of the wood. I wanted to pursue that sound.

It's funny, because after I had gone down that road, I wanted to go back to the thick sound of a Les Paul without changing guitars. That's when I got the Fender signature model with the midrange-boost function. Now I have the best of both worlds.

You've said in the past that after you heard the Band you made the decision to leave the bombast of Cream. Did hearing them also affect how you wanted to hear the guitar?

Very much so. What I appreciated about the Band was that they were more concerned with songs and singing. They would have three- and four-part harmonies, and the guitar was put back into perspective as being accompaniment. That suited me well, because I had gotten so tired of the virtuosity—or *pseudo*-virtuosity—thing of long, boring guitar solos just because they were expected. The Band brought things back into perspective. The priority was the song.

At this time, do you consider yourself a songwriter first and a guitarist second?

Yes, I think I've reached that point. For me, it was a reverse process. I started out as solely a guitar player, then I learned how to sing, and then I learned how to write and eventually became a songwriter. Now I feel like all of those skills are equal.

Do you ever tire of playing older tunes such as "Badge" or "Sunshine of Your Love"?

Believe it or not, I still find them refreshing. The tiring thing is trying to bring new songs from *Reptile* to the stage and introduce them to an audience. You're towing a big weight, because nobody has heard them and they're not really interested. But when you go into "Badge," *everyone* knows it.

What do you play on the guitar at home?

If you hand me a guitar, I'll play the blues. That's the place I automatically go.

ALAN DOUGLAS ON RECORDING *REPTILE*

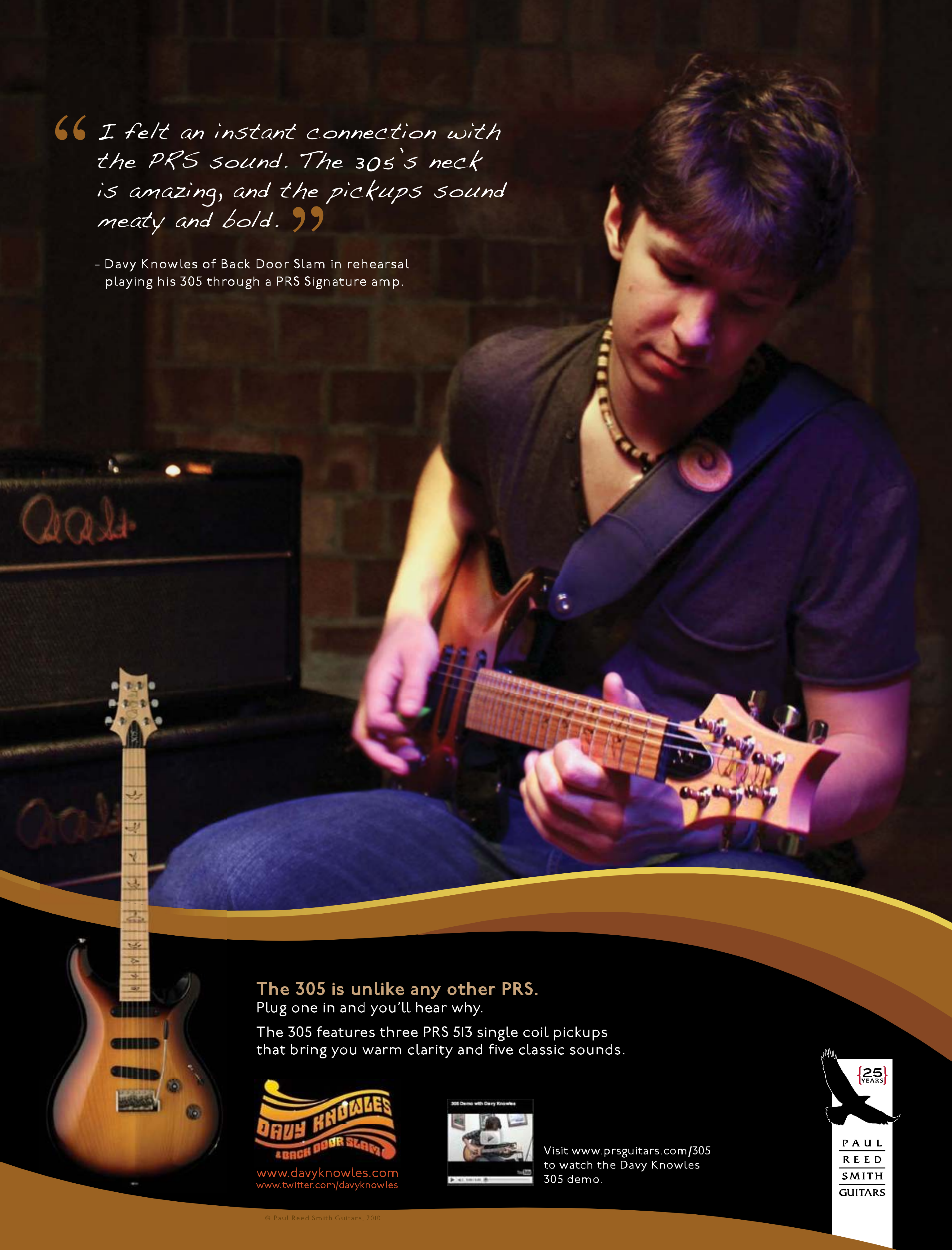
"With Eric and his band, you have to make sure you're *always* recording," says Alan Douglas, who has engineered all of Clapton's records since *From the Cradle*. "I'm working with the best musicians on the planet, so it's a case of recording in the original sense of the word: Archiving a particular moment in time and making sure it's a faithful—and hopefully glorious—representation of what was going on. When you have that much talent in the room, there are a lot of musical subtleties and interactive nuances, and you have to make sure everything is captured.

"We started the record on a Sony 3348 recorder, and then we went to the 24-bit 3348 HR. We used Pro Tools, but its main purpose was to edit arrangements—we didn't use it to comp parts. Pro Tools also makes overdubbing very fast, because you don't have to wait for the tape to rewind.

"Almost 99.9 percent of Eric's sound is in his fingers, so I used the same miking formula I always use for him—three close mics positioned on one speaker and some room mics. The close mics were an Electro-Voice RE20, a Beyer M88, and a Shure SM57. The room mics included a Brawner VM1, a Neumann M-50, and various others. There were no EQ adjustments at the board—I fine-tuned the amp tones with mic placement. By varying the balance of the three close mics, I could get whatever sound I needed. For example, if I wanted a brighter sound, I'd bring up the mic pointed directly at the speaker cone. If I wanted more midrange honk, I'd increase the level of the mic positioned off-axis to the speaker. And because the RE20 typically captures more low end, I'd go for that mic if I needed a warmer tone.

"I recorded the acoustic guitars with an old tube Schoeps microphone from the '60s. We generally placed the mic at the midpoint of the top of the neck and soundhole and added some gentle compression.

"What sets Eric apart from most guitarists is natural talent. He was born to be a great guitarist. The first time I worked with Eric he was demoing some tunes for a film, and there was no amp at the session. I was a huge fan of Eric's from his Cream days, and I remember thinking, 'You've got to get an amp—this will never work.' But I plugged him into a tube preamp, dialed up some reverb and delay, and it sounded *exactly* like Eric Clapton."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Bitter Herbs & Tea

BUDDY GUY

BREWS A BLEND OF ASTOUNDING TONES & HILL-COUNTRY BLUES

BY SHAWN HAMMOND

AS A GUITARIST WHO HAS STOOD AT THE crossroads of blues and rock, Buddy Guy is one of the few who can claim to have been mentored by blues legends such as Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf and to have influenced rock heroes such as Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck, and Eric Clapton. Guy's tortured leads and searing vocals have earned him legendary status, and, as evidenced by his astonishing new release, Sweet Tea [Silvertone], the 65-year-old can still set the blues world ablaze. n A tribute to North Mississippi hill-country blues, Sweet Tea is brimming with blistering tones, fervid performances, and a swampy, lo-fi vibe. This is Guy's finest work in years. All told, the sounds, the concept, and Guy's possessed delivery, make *Sweet Tea* one of the most profound blues recordings of the last decade.

Just as riveting is the paradoxical story behind the album's creation. Though *Sweet Tea* producer Dennis Herring is known for his work with superstar acts such as Counting Crows and Jars of Clay, his interest in old-school blues fostered a desire to cut a raw, roots-oriented album with Guy. However, Guy—who has long yearned for crossover radio success—was initially skeptical about Herring's choice of far-from- hit-oriented material and the project's stripped-down sonic vision. But ten days after the sessions began, Guy and Herring emerged with an album of astounding depth and emotion. *Sweet Tea* epitomizes the hysteria of Guy's live performances—and a whole lot more.

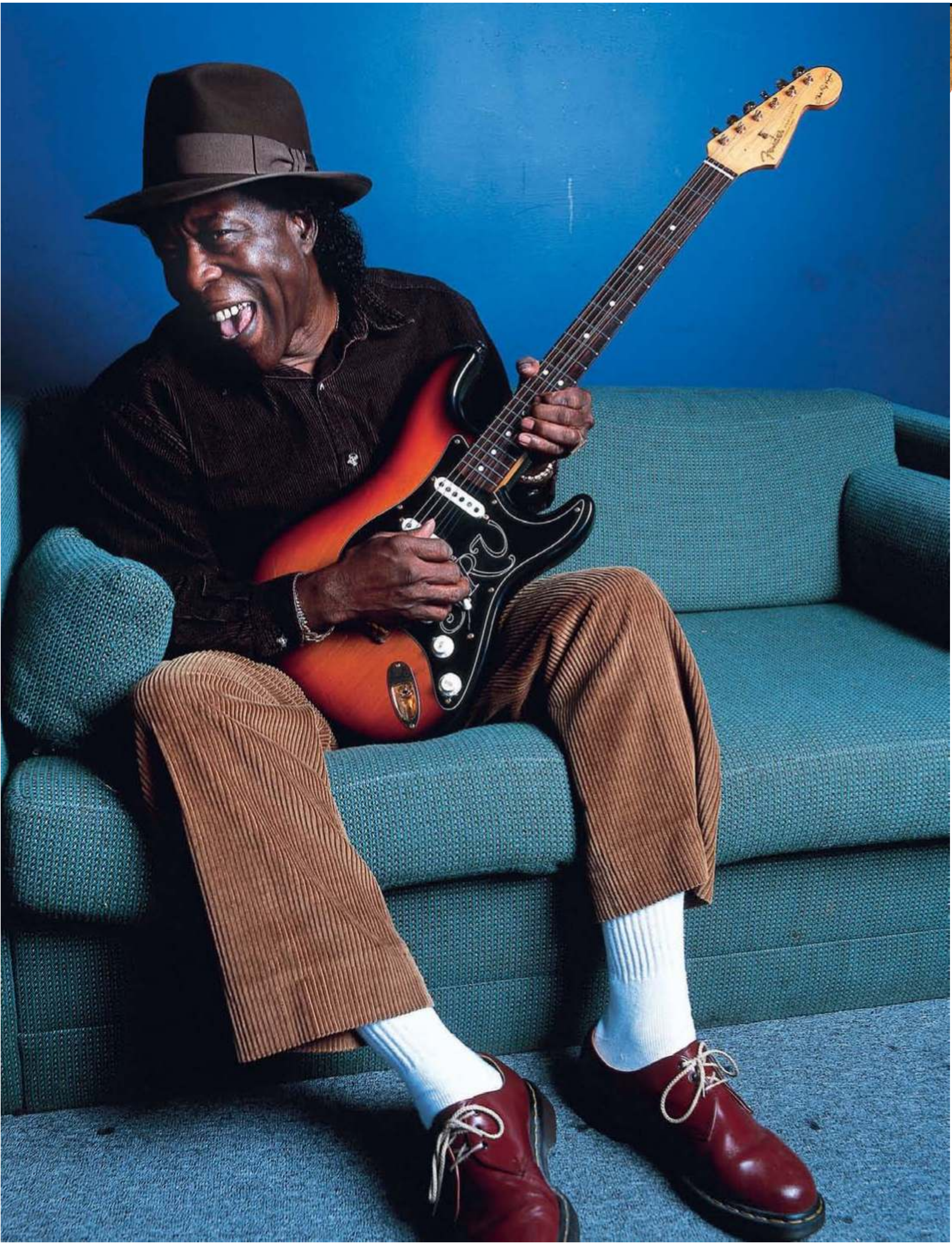
• • • • •

How did you feel about covering hill-country songs on Sweet Tea*?*

To be honest, when my record company said, "Go to Mississippi and play these songs, Buddy," I didn't like the idea. But Buddy don't pass up opportunity. The late Willie Dixon told me that some recording is better than none at all. So I went down there and played the North Mississippi style the best I could. I take every chance I get to record now.

Why were you skeptical about the concept?

Because Dennis went way back and got this Mississippi stuff that I didn't know very well. I thought I'd learned some of that style from Muddy Waters, Son House, and Fred McDowell. But when Dennis first



PAUL NATKIN

BUDDY GUY continued

played the songs for me, I said, "Man, that's traditional stuff—who is it?" My thought was, "I don't know enough about this to play it." And he just kept saying, "We don't *want* you to know it—we want you to play Buddy Guy with what we're gonna give you."

Did the fact that you hadn't heard those songs before make it extra exciting or inspiring to play them?

Yes, because every time I hear something, I think I can learn from it.

I was blown away when I first heard Sweet Tea. *The tones are radically different from recent blues albums.*

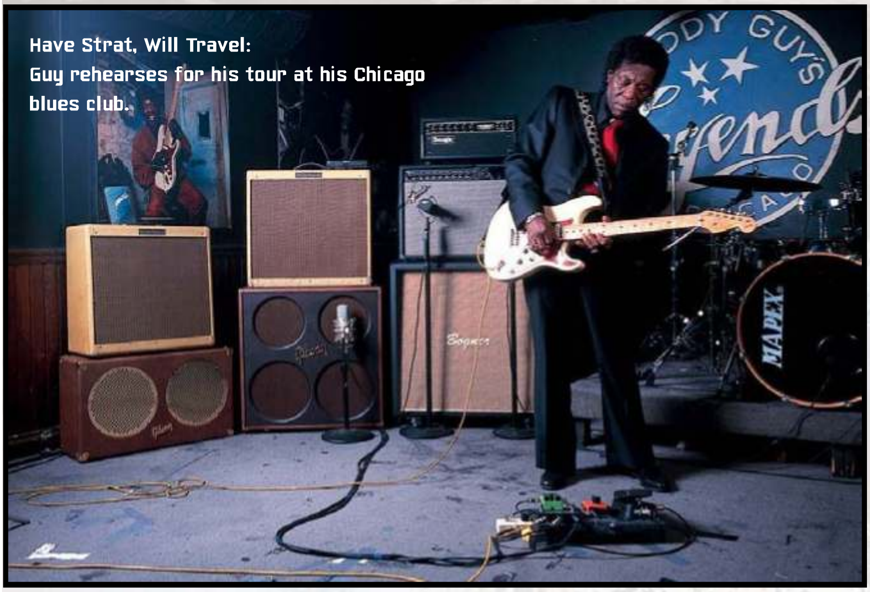
Well, thank you. If it's as good as you're saying, maybe I better go back down there and find some more old songs [*laughs*]. You're right about the tones, and that's because Dennis had all these vintage amplifiers. (See sidebar, "Producer Dennis Herring on Sweet Tea" on p. 107.) If I'd known way back what I know now, I'd have taken a day job and just collected guitars and amplifiers!

Which of Herring's amps were your favorites?

I'm not sure what they were, but I wish you could've seen me when he brought them things down. You listen to the tones on those things, and man—no special effects or nothing—the amplifiers are doing everything. I tell kids, "You don't need all these effects, just turn that damn amplifier on—it has what you want in it!"

Did playing through all that vintage equipment make you approach the music any differently?

No, because it's what I've been doing all my life. I can only play what I know. Now I'm using the Fender Cyber-Twin, and it has a tone! It comes closer to what Fender was all about in the beginning. The Bassman has a tone on it, too, man. It made Clapton, Beck, Hendrix, and all of them come to me and ask what I was doing, but I wasn't doing anything but turning it on. The Cyber-Twin has a lot of technology



Have Strat, Will Travel: Guy rehearses for his tour at his Chicago blues club.

PAUL NATKIN

MARK MESSNER ON GUY'S GEAR

Even though Buddy loves old vintage stuff, he doesn't want to bring it on the road," notes Guy's guitar tech, Mark Messner, who has also worked with Corrosion of Conformity, Veruca Salt, and Monster Magnet.

"For the *Sweet Tea* sessions, Buddy used a '57 Les Paul goldtop reissue (strung with Ernie Balls, gauged .010-.048) and a pewter-colored Eric Clapton signature Strat (tuned to *D*, and strung with Ernie Balls, gauged .013-.062). For the road, he's taking his black-and-white polka dot Strat and the original blond Strat Fender made him—both of those guitars, as well as the Clapton Strat, have Lace Sensor pickups. He's also taking the '57 Les Paul and a Big Apple hardtail Strat that has a Seymour Duncan humbucker in the bridge position. He occasionally pulls out a Gibson Blues King Electro acoustic in concert, too.

"Buddy's talking about doing at least five or six songs from *Sweet Tea* every night, and he wants to recreate the tones as close as possible, so I'm talking with [producer] Dennis Herring to figure out what amps were used on each song. Then I'll use that information to program the right sounds into Buddy's Fender Cyber-Twin.

"A while ago, we were up to four amps—a Bogner, two Victorias, and a Gibson Super Goldtone. But then I saw Fender's new catalog, and I said, 'If this Cyber-Twin does what it says it does, I could give you all the sounds you want with one amp.' When the amp arrived, I brought up the '59 Bassman preset, set the knobs the way Buddy likes them—with the bass all the way down and everything else set to 12—and had him play. After five seconds, he said, 'I don't believe it—it sounds exactly like a '59 Bassman!' We're using two Cyber-Twins to recreate the new songs where he used two amps in the studio. Onstage, we mic the amps with Shure SM7s.

"Also, I use a prototype of the Cyber-Twin's footswitch to control the amp programs offstage. But Buddy doesn't play to a set list, and he switches keys and feels all the time, so I have to watch him like a hawk and try to anticipate what he's going to do next. I also control his Ibanez Tube Screamer, while Buddy controls his CryBaby wah and either a Maxon Phase Tone or an MXR Phase 90 from onstage. His picks are thin Dunlop triangles, and he uses either a 200' Ernie Ball cable or a Shure UC wireless system." —SH

in it, but it comes pretty close to all the sounds that Dennis got on the album. After my guitar tech brought it to me, and I played through it for a while, he said he hadn't seen me smile like that in a long time. I guess some people were criticizing me on the Internet, saying that Fender had given me a lot of money to play that thing [*laughs*]. But Stratocasters and Fender amps have been my favorites all my life. I just want something that sounds good, man.

Your tech mentioned you were using a Bogner for a while.

Oh, I've been running through some of everything for the last 15 or 20 years. I won't name them, but some of them wouldn't make it from one gig to another. But that old Bassman, I remember I loaned it to Otis Redding, and he had it in the trunk when he totaled his Cadillac. When he brought the amp back to me, I plugged it in, and it was fine. Now I have flight cases for some of these amps, and sometimes I *still* have to have them fixed after I get to Europe, or something. Things just ain't what they used to be.

How would you describe the evolution of your playing from the '60s to now?

I've learned a little more, but it's still Buddy Guy. If you put me through a modern amplifier, somebody is going to say, "He don't sound like he used to." Well, of course, the guitars and amps aren't the same today. But the *man* is still the same. I'm using the same fingers I left Louisiana with. I can't really say how my style has changed, though. I used to tell T-Bone Walker, B.B., Lightnin' Hopkins, Muddy, and John Lee Hooker—all those guys I learned from—that I didn't have anything unique. Guess what they said? "Buddy, we got it from someone else, too."

What was the biggest lesson you learned from the blues legends you worked with?

Oh, man, lesson number one is be cool. They weren't making any money, but they were having fun playing. I used to look at them and say, "Buddy, you ain't never gonna be that good, and nobody is ever going to fill those shoes." Those guys weren't superstars then, but I thought they were living the high life. It made me think, "This is as high as you can go." Then the British groups got into the blues, and were able to live decently from it. But I still worked in the daytime—I drove a tow truck.

What do you think of the current generation of blues guitarists?

I'm very proud of them. Every time I go to New York, I play with Jonny Lang, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, and Susan Tedeschi. A lot of young people today are saying, "Why should I play blues? I don't ever hear it." But someone needs to keep playing blues, because who is going to take over when me and B.B. say, "That's enough?"

How does it feel to know so many blues and rock players count you as a huge influence?

It makes me feel great, because some of the

JIMBO MATHUS ON PLAYING WITH GUY

hythm guitarist Jim "Jimbo" Mathus claims his role in the *Sweet Tea* project was mainly to keep the groove going. "Dennis just wanted me to keep the band fired up," he says. "He introduced me to them as the 'Sparkplug.'"

For the sessions, Mathus relied on two main guitars: a mid-'60s Silvertone with two DeArmond single-coils, and an Epiphone '56 goldtop Les Paul reissue—both strung with D'Addarios, gauged .011-.052.

He ran all the guitars through a '74 Fender Bassman and a Showman 2x15 cabinet. "I cranked it pretty damn loud—it was on 7 or 8 the whole time," Mathus says. "My only other 'gear' was my thumb and my first finger, because that's what you use to play in the style of North Mississippi guitarists. Another integral part of this style of blues is slack tuning. For 'Baby Please Don't Leave Me,' we tuned the guitars down to *C*. You get a lot of buzzing, but that's what you want."

Mathus' favorite memory from the *Sweet Tea* sessions was sitting on the couch with Guy as he tracked "Done Got Old." "He did three or four takes," says Mathus, "and every time you'd think it couldn't get any better, but it did. Buddy's ability to take a simple groove to heaven is inspiring." —SH

BUDDY GUY continued

things that people like Eric Clapton and Keith Richards and the late Stevie Ray Vaughan said about me have helped me more than any record company. So many kids come up to me and say, "I didn't know anything about you until I read what Eric Clapton said." That gives me a big lift.

Is there any new music, other than blues, that inspires you?

Even when I was learning how to play blues, I would listen to spiritual music, jazz, and rock 'n' roll—I even listen to the hip-hop. My daughter had me play on her hip-hop video.

PRODUCER DENNIS HERRING ON SWEET TEA

BESIDES PRODUCING GUY'S LATEST release at his Sweet Tea studio in Oxford, Mississippi, Dennis Herring has worked with Counting Crows, Jars of Clay, Camper Van Beethoven, and (hed) pe.

How did you get involved with Buddy Guy?

I had been lobbying his record company and manager for about two years to do a record like this. While I'm a big fan of Buddy's records, I felt the ones from the last ten years or so had gotten real studio-like. I wanted to get him in a setting where it would be natural for him to do the high-energy stuff that he does live—singing really high and kind of crazy, and doing wild guitar things.

Why did you focus on hill-country blues?

Well, pretty early on, Delta blues became more refined—in sort of a pop-song sense. It has a structure with choruses and hooks. For that reason, I'm not really a fan of modern blues records. But the North Mississippi hill-country style is more drawn-out and trance-like. Because the style is so raw—and because it hasn't gotten a lot of attention—I thought it would be great to get Buddy doing *his* raw thing in that context.

What were you looking for when you put the band together?

The soul of the band was the drummer, Spam, who plays with a North Mississippi artist named T-Model Ford. He really only plays one beat—a stomp—but he's so great at it. I imagined the arrangements based around that stomp beat, and I picked songs that are indigenous to the North Mississippi style. We did a few by Junior Kimbrough, and some by T-ModelFord, Robert Cage, and CeDell Davis.

Why did you select Jimbo Mathus to fill the rhythm-guitar chair?

Jimbo is from Clarksdale, Mississippi, and he grew up learning to play just like the old guys. In the end, he was the perfect guy for the job because he has this cool quirk in his playing—he sounds like he's always on the edge of a mistake. I love it when someone is a great musician, but they have this natural flaw that threatens to take over, but it doesn't.

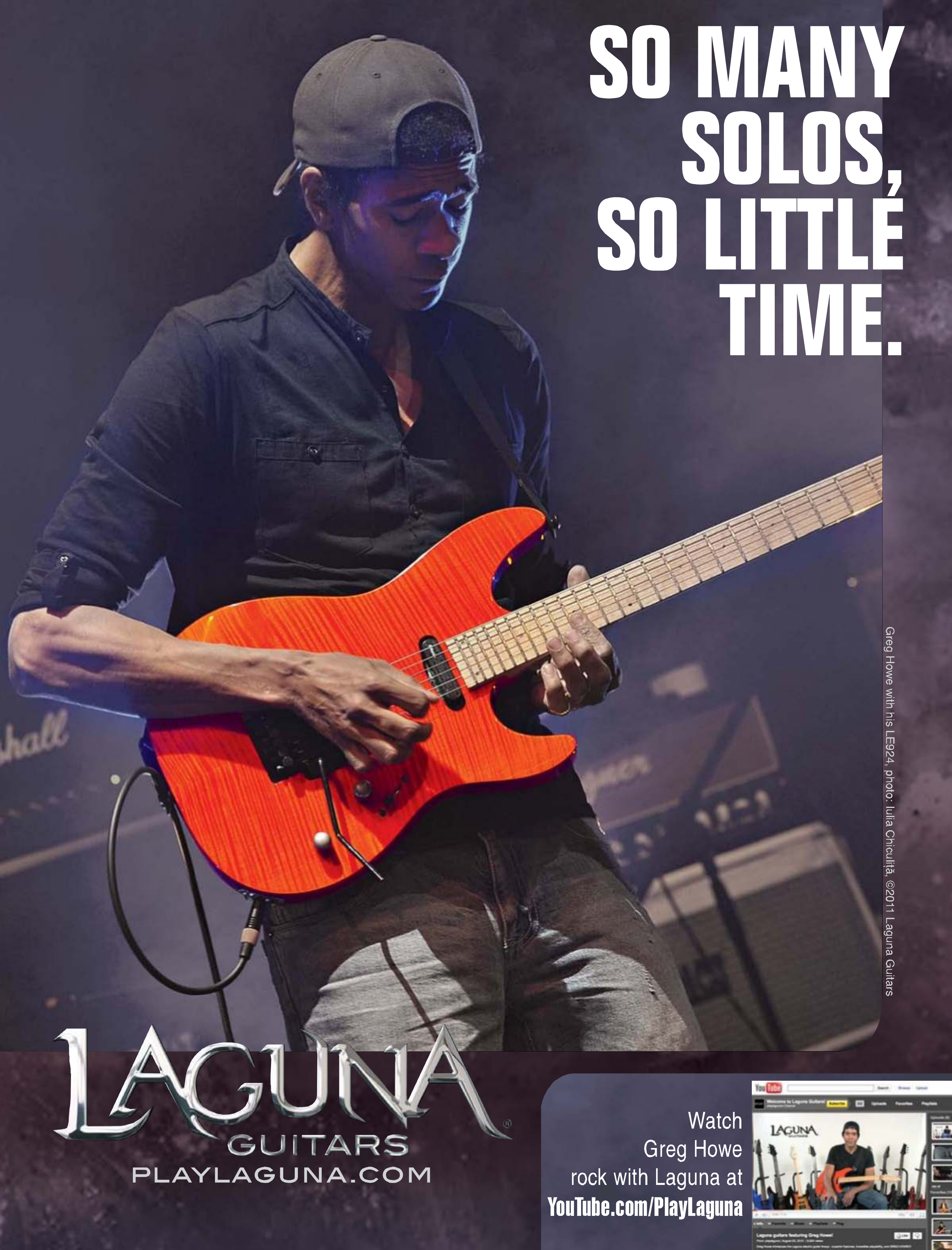
After selecting the backup band, how did you prepare for the album?

I made Buddy a CD of the songs I wanted to do, and I encouraged him to get comfortable with the songs—but I didn't want him to *learn* them. My vision was to just throw everybody together and work the songs up. I wanted it to be kind of *scary*.

I had Buddy staying in a house close to the studio, and I would go over there with this old Gibson ES-125. We'd get ready for the day's sessions by playing some of the songs together, and then I'd go back and rehearse the songs with the band. Buddy would come in around six o'clock, and we'd record. That's basically how we did it for ten days. But before we could start, I had to set up a bar in the studio control room.

A bar?

Right—including a bartender! I found out that Buddy likes to take a drink or two when he plays live, and I thought, "If I have a bar, I can probably get the record to approximate his live sound


SO MANY SOLOS, SO LITTLE TIME.
Greg Howe with his LE924, photo: Iulia Chiculiţă, ©2011 Laguna Guitars
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BUDDY GUY continued

Do you think the blues needs to be modernized in order to stay relevant?

I don't know if I can answer that. You know, when they put a Robert Johnson CD out a few years ago, it went gold—and he had been dead 40 years. B.B. King told me the record he did with Clapton, *Riding with the King*, was the biggest-selling record he has ever made.

But let's be honest—when you're black, it doesn't matter how good a blues record you make, you're not going to get it played on these big radio stations unless some super guy like Eric Clapton or Stevie Ray Vaughan plays the same thing you played. That's just the way it is. Blues has been like that ever since I've been alive—it has been ignored until some rock group gets it, plays it to big audiences, and tells them whose music it is. But, I guess that's why we still sing the blues. I just look at it like a prize-fighter—if I don't get in that ring and risk getting knocked out, I ain't got a chance to win.

Are you happy with Sweet Tea*?*

I'm not even listening to it. I enjoyed doing it, but after we were done, I said, "I don't want to hear it." I want somebody to call me and tell me if it's good."

DENNIS HERRING continued

more."

What gear did you use for the sessions?

I was shocked when Buddy showed up with just two guitars—a Strat and a Les Paul. I said, "You don't have any amps?" He just looked around and said, "No, but I see you've got a bunch of good-looking stuff sitting around here." So, I pulled out all my amps and lined them up. I had him play his Strat while I plugged him into each amp, and we'd listen for a few minutes. Then I picked my favorites, and we started the process over again with the Les Paul.

The amps used the most were a '63 blackface Fender Deluxe, a late-'60s silverface Super Reverb, and a '50s tweed Gibson Explorer with a 10" speaker. I also ran a 50-watt Dumble head through the Super Reverb's cabinet. A lot of times, I'd bi-amp him. I'd plug him straight into the Deluxe, then use one of the parallel input jacks to run the signal into the Dumble head. This setup gave Buddy more sustain and attack. I didn't want to go through any pedals to split his signal. In fact, we didn't use any pedals.

Did you use the bi-amp setup on every song?

It varied. We only ran the Les Paul through the Explorer, because they sounded like they were made to play together. The amp might change from song to song, and no matter which amp or amps we were using, I told the engineer to record the guitar on one track. I don't like to end up with tons of tracks on tape, and then have to make a lot of decisions when I mix. I'd rather make the decisions up front.

Also, we recorded everything live. I had Buddy singing and playing guitar in the same room as his amps. We recorded him in a hallway, and I put his amps at one end, and had him stand at the other end. When he did his solos, his vocal mic—a Neumann U47—became the room mic. It was just like the good old days.

How did you mic the guitars?

We close-miked the amps with a Shure SM57 and a Sennheiser 421.

Do you recall which songs feature the Les Paul/Explorer combination?

He used it on "She Got the Devil in Her," and that's one of my favorite guitar sounds on the record. It reminded me of Jeff Beck's tone on "I Ain't Superstitious" from *Truth*. It freaked me out when we got that sound! I think we also used that combination on "Baby Please Don't Leave Me."

So the rest of the songs were recorded with Guy playing Strats and Fender amps?

The record definitely leans more to the Strat side. Although on "Done Got Old," he used my Gibson ES-125. It has flatwound strings, and I miked it acoustically.

Did you use any other techniques to get interesting tones?

The rhythm guitar, bass, and drums were all set up in the main room—which creates a distinct sound in itself. When we had two of Buddy's amps going, I'd run one of them through Jimbo's Fender reverb unit. When Buddy was soloing, sometimes I'd go down and turn up the reverb as he was playing. Buddy would really get off on that. He'd start riding the reverb with his lick, then he'd just get more and more fired up, and ride it *more*. I accidentally kicked the tank on "I Got to Try You Girl," and you can hear the springs rattling around on the record.

Did you use any digital editing to construct the arrangements?

I used an Otari Radar hard-disk system because it allowed me to worry about just one thing: making sure Buddy was getting off. With a digital workstation, if Buddy sang the wrong words on a chorus of an otherwise-great take, it was no big deal to fix—I'd just drop in the right lines from another chorus. And if I wanted the band to keep playing a certain part, I'd just signal to them to keep going. In fact, most of the songs originally existed as 20- or 25-minute takes. So I'd have a 25-minute take of, say, "Baby Please Don't Leave Me," which had parts that were crazy good, but it would also have parts that weren't as good. I simply pieced together all the good takes, and turned them into the versions that are on the album.

How did you deal with Guy's initial skepticism over doing hill-country blues songs?

Buddy was probably thinking, "I want my next record to have some hits on it, so what the hell is *this* thing you're talking about?" But I think it helped that I had just come off a platinum- and gold-record run with Counting Crows and Jars of Clay, respectively. I kept telling him that we weren't going to worry about singles, we were just going to do a record that was really exciting. And if the record was exciting enough, it would build its own success. —SH

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Trigger Fingers

How Stevie Ray Vaughan Played His Way Out of the Clubs And Into Legend

BY MATT BLACKETT

NEW WAVE BANDS LIKE THE GO-GOS and Men at Work shared the airwaves with pop rockers such as Journey and Foreigner. The closest thing to a blues-based guitar hero was Eddie Van Halen, and a I-IV-V shuffle was about as uncool as you could get. That all changed overnight when a guitar slinger from Austin, Texas, named Stevie Ray Vaughan exploded on the scene in 1983.

It's difficult now for most guitarists to remember a time before SRV. His tone, style, and stage show have all become popular-music benchmarks. But that was *not* the case when Vaughan first set the world of guitar on fire. Most guitarists went from never having heard of the guy to not being able to get away from him. Turn on rock radio and you'd hear a track off Vaughan's slamming debut album. Switch to a pop station and there he was again on David Bowie's *Let's Dance*. It seemed to happen so suddenly that it was easy for some to think that Vaughan hadn't paid his dues.

The fact is, Vaughan and his band, Double Trouble, did their time playing dive bars and lousy gigs as much as anyone. When things *did* start to click for SRV, each new break was plagued with difficulty. And when the red carpet was finally rolled out, Vaughan paid dues with every step he took on it.

Nowhere was this "best of times, worst of times" dichotomy more obvious than at the 1982 Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland. Without a doubt the biggest gig of Vaughan's career, the festival would hopefully be his ticket out of the dives and into the big time. It proved to be exactly that, but not before SRV would go through yet another trial by fire, which is immortalized on the new, two-CD *Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble—Live in Montreux 1982 and 1985* [Sony]. Montreux would also lead to Vaughan guesting on the huge pop record that would further his legend and reputation, but even *that* break would turn into a brutal rite of passage.

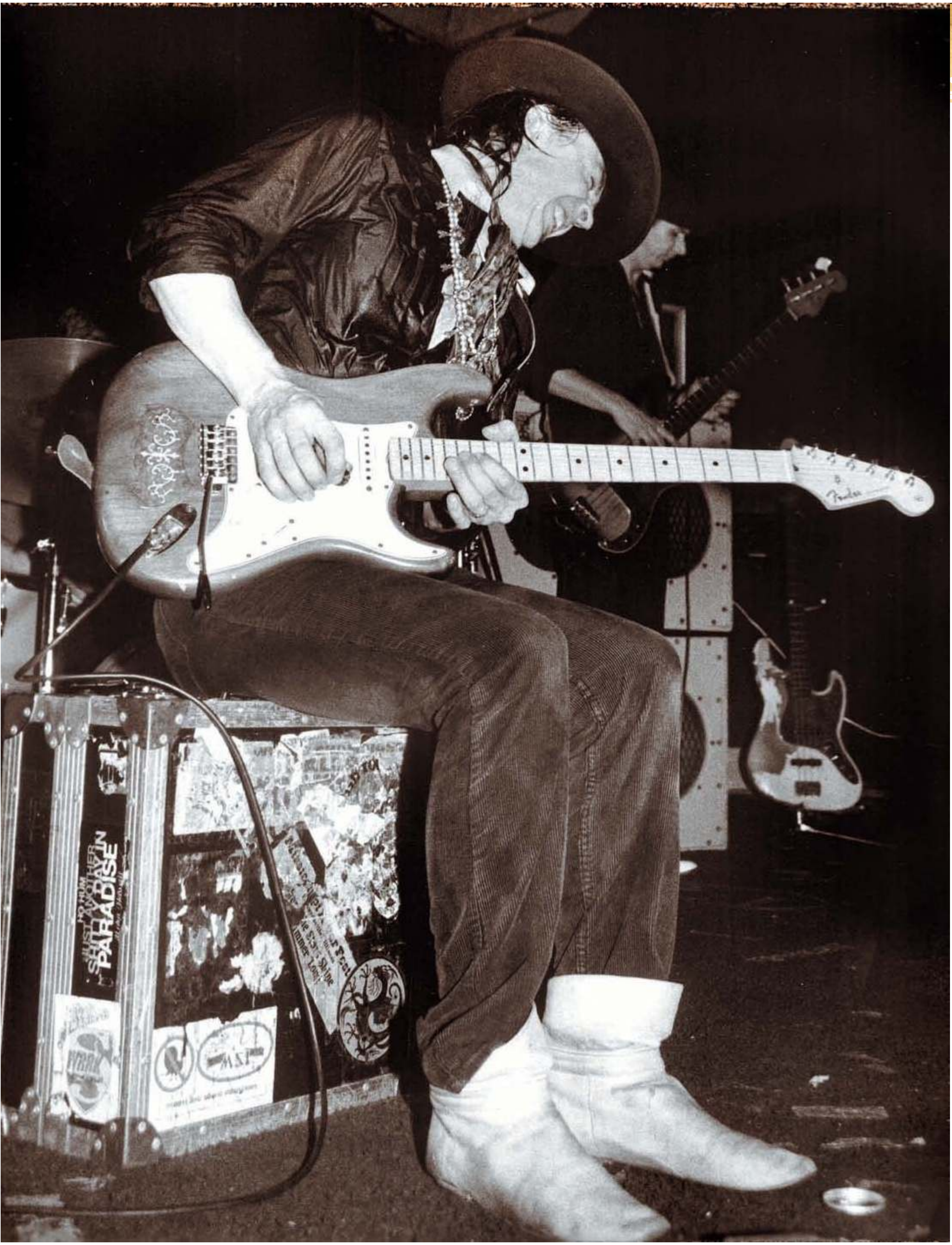
By the time SRV returned to Montreux in 1985, he was at the top of the blues guitar heap, and it was just another gig where everyone loved him. The following recollections, however, are from the people who worked with Vaughan *before* he became famous. As his bandmates, guitar tech, producer, and admirers, they recognized his genius before anyone else, and they are best able to paint the picture of SRV on the verge of becoming a superstar.

THE ROAD TO MONTREUX

"I first saw Stevie play in early 1977," recalls Double Trouble drummer Chris Layton. "I was awestruck."

"When I saw Stevie, it was like a revelation," adds bassist Tommy Shannon. "That's where I wanted to be. When they called me, that was one of the happiest days of my life."

The band started working the



CLAYTON CALL

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN continued

Austin/Lubbock/Houston/Dallas circuit, but was unable to take things to the next level. "Before the Montreux show, we were mostly doing club gigs in Texas," says Layton. "We'd gone to the East Coast twice and the West Coast once—all low-dollar gigs."

"We were traveling around in a milk truck," elaborates Shannon, "with a bed rigged up on top, a couch for a back seat, and all of our gear crammed in there. We were living lean."

Despite all the struggles, Vaughan's reputation was growing, and the band's slamming live shows were impressing audiences, regardless of size. "We always played with enthusiasm and excitement," says Layton, "even if we were only playing to five people. And we never got a bad reception."

For the most part that seems true, but Shannon does remember a particularly rugged gig. "We opened for the Clash in Austin," he says, "and people were yelling and throwing stuff and telling us we sucked. We were supposed to do two shows, but we told them we weren't doing the second night. For some reason, I don't remember that hurting our feelings too much, though."

SWISS BANK

While Vaughan and company were slugging it out in the clubs, they crossed paths with veteran R&B producer Jerry Wexler, who was so taken with the band that he arranged to get them on a really prestigious gig—blues night at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland. "I had played the Montreux Festival with Johnny Winter in 1969 and we went over great," says Shannon. "I told the guys how beautiful it was. I had nothing but good memories."

Layton recalls feeling a nervous excitement about the gig. "Stevie and I had never been to Europe, and we were excited by the prospect," he says. "But it was going to cost us over $15,000 to go, and we had to get a loan from our management group. Even though it seemed risky, Stevie thought we should give it a shot because we were doing the same clubs over and over. People loved us, but we wondered where we were going with it."

So off they went to Switzerland with the intention of taking the country by storm. Sitting backstage before going on only served to heighten the excitement for the band. "Larry Graham came up to us backstage and told Stevie, 'I've heard about you. I know you're a badass guitar player,'" remembers Layton. "That was way cool, because we were huge fans of Sly & the Family Stone."

Shannon was particularly jazzed to meet one of his bass heroes. "Graham is one of my favorite bass players," he says. "He's so innovative. He asked if he could jam with us during our encore on 'Johnny B. Goode.' Stevie was really pumped up then—not just about the gig, but also about the chance to jam with Larry Graham."

Certain factors, however, would prevent the set from being all that SRV had hoped it would be. "I noticed that there hadn't been any other electric bands up until we went on," says Layton. "It occurred to me that we were going to be quite a contrast—Stevie had a couple of amps up there, and we always played loud. But it never entered our minds that we might not go over."

"It was all acoustic acts," adds Shannon. "We shouldn't have been playing that night. We came out blasting, but we didn't think anything of it. People were always telling Stevie he was too loud, so nothing seemed out of the ordinary."

What *was* out of the ordinary was the crowd's response. Almost instantly people started booing, and the boos would persist for SRV's entire performance. Roots legend John Hammond, Jr. opened the show that night and vividly recalls the events. "When I did my set, the crowd response was amazing," he says. "It was one of those magical nights. I had heard Stevie before that night, because he was already legendary as a guitar wizard in blues circles. And he was always very respectful to the blues. The only radical thing was the volume, and that was his undoing at Montreux. He was so loud it was overwhelming. He was playing his ass off, but he lost the crowd by his second song. People weren't hearing the *music* because of the volume."

Darryl Pitt was the staff photographer at Montreux for nine years, and he worked the '82 show. Despite having heard countless amazing musicians over the years, Pitt knew instantly that he was witnessing a unique talent. "This guy I had never heard of came out and started playing and stalking the stage and I was *shaking*," he recalls. "I was a blues fan, but I was not a fan of the schmaltzy blues revues that were successfully touring Europe at the time. There was nothing schmaltzy about Stevie—he was the real deal. I couldn't believe the crowd didn't get that. Then the boos started, and from where I was in the front row, the boos were a lot louder than what you hear on the recording. You could see it on Stevie's face later in the set—it got to him."

Pitt has a different take on why Vaughan wasn't better received that night. "In my opinion," he says, "it wasn't about acoustic versus electric. I think it was racist. I think the crowd turned on this white guy in the cowboy hat who they viewed as kind of a caricature. I believe Albert King would have gone over playing the exact same stuff."

While Pitt and Hammond were watching the drama unfold, Vaughan and his bandmates were living it, cranking out rocking versions of future classics such as "Pride and Joy," "Texas Flood," and "Love Struck Baby," despite the hostile crowd reaction. "I realized after the first song that we weren't getting to them," says Shannon. "You could look out there and see people frowning, and we could hear them booing. It hurt Stevie bad, but he didn't let up. He just kept doing what he does. He didn't panic or withdraw."

"Because I know Stevie so well," says Layton, "I could tell it was affecting him onstage. But he didn't change his approach. He wasn't arrogant about it, but his attitude was, 'If you don't like us, we're sorry, but we're going to keep on, because that's all we know how to do.' It was heartbreaking, though—especially for Stevie. When we finally got off stage he was like, 'Oh man, what just happened?'"

MONTREUX POST MORTEM

As SRV was reeling from the shock of his performance, Pitt took it upon himself to find the unknown guitarist and apologize for the crowd. "I went backstage," he recalls, "and I saw Stevie slumped on a roadcase with a bare light bulb hanging over him. It's one of the bleakest things I've ever seen. As the staff photographer, I should have snapped that picture, because it perfectly encapsulated what had just happened. But all I could think to do was tell him how great I thought he was, and that the crowd was totally wrong. He smiled and thanked me. Even though he'd been through this ordeal he was really

TEXAS TECH SUPPORT

DON OPPERMAN WAS STEVIE RAY Vaughan's tech at the time of the Montreux *festival in 1982. Here he recalls the gear, tricks, and psychology he used to help SRV do his thing. —MB*

"I first met Stevie in the late '70s," says Opperman. "I was working with Joe Walsh at the time, and I had no interest in working with a blues band. I didn't actually hear Stevie play until 1981, when he opened for George Thorogood in Albuquerque. I walked into the show, and it felt like seeing Hendrix for the first time. I was just awestruck at how well this kid could play. I started teching for him shortly after that.

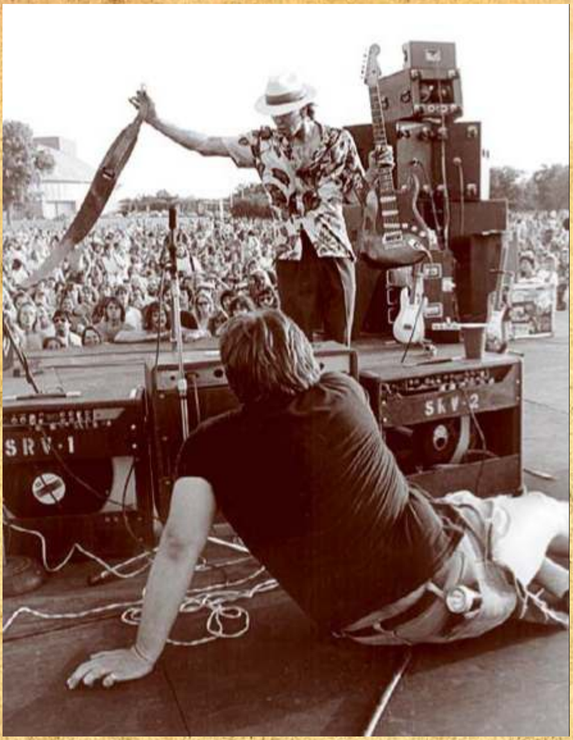
"I was at the Montreux gig in '82. Stevie brought guitars and his pedalboard—he didn't bring his amps. For guitars, he had #1, his famous '59 Strat. That was the only one that would really stay in tune when he threw it on the ground. He also brought Lenny, which is a '62 or a '63 woodgrain brown Strat, and a Strat called Butter—a guitar originally owned by the guy from Vanilla Fudge. Butter was routed for four humbuckers at one point, but Stevie just had a DiMarzio single-coil in the neck position. The only other guitar was a 3-color sunburst Tokai. As I recall, he played all of those that day.

"I would string Stevie's guitars with whatever gauges we had in the string box. I'd start with .011s, and when those ran out we'd go to .012s or .013s. The low strings were GHS semi-flats—a roundwound string pressed into a flatter shape—because he liked their low-end response. In fact, that's how we would set up his amps—he'd pop the open low-*E* with his finger and tweak the amp until that one note sounded right to him. His action was incredibly high—about 1/4" off the fretboard. I couldn't believe he could bend the strings, but he did. The guy had amazing strength in his hands. He used heavy picks, but not the pointed end—he would use the butt end. He would also rub the pointed end on the carpet to round it off.

"Stevie's pedalboard was really simple—just an MXR loop selector, an Ibanez Tube Screamer, and a Vox wah. Before I built the pedalboard, [SRV's manager] Cutter Brandenburg used to run out onstage with a wah pedal and unplug Stevie's cord from the amp and plug the wah in! The loop selector sent his signal either directly to his amps or through the effects. When it went to the effects, it would hit the Tube Screamer first, and then the wah—which is the opposite of how most guys do it. It's a Joe Walsh trick that I passed on to Stevie. He liked the way the wah sounded better when it came after the Tube Screamer—he got a little more tone out of it. I would also tweak Stevie's wahs to tune them. I'd open up the wah, and with the pedal in the toe position, I'd rotate the pot until it was at the frequency Stevie wanted. He knew how much treble he needed out of it.

"When I worked with Stevie, he was using two Fender Vibroverbs for his dirty sound and he got his clean sound from a Marshall Club and Country 2x12 combo. He didn't have his amps for the Montreux gig, so he played through two blackface Twins. We spent a lot of time working with them, mostly messing with the EQ, and we had a lot of problems with the volume that day. Stevie was used to people telling him he was too loud, but he wouldn't turn down. The sound that he's so famous for is *based* on volume. He did make some concessions because they were recording that day, so he let me tip the amps back on their legs, and I put towels over them to try to reduce the volume a little. But Stevie had never played Montreux before, and he was going to give it all he had. He couldn't get the Twins to break up like his Vibroverbs, though, and his sound was a little brighter and cleaner than normal.

"I didn't see much reaction on Stevie's face until after the gig, and he was really bummed at the crowd's response. But he played great that night. I had no idea that all the connections would come from the Montreux show, but I definitely felt like Stevie was on the verge of being a big star."



WATT CASEY, JR.

SRV onstage in 1981. His manager, Cutter Brandenburg, lurks behind two Fender Vibroverbs and a Marshall 2x12.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN continued

warm and friendly."

Hammond also spoke with SRV after his set, and tried to reassure his fellow bluesman that this was a fluke. "He came off the stage in tears," says Hammond. "He was really vulnerable—there was no attitude. He just said, 'Aw man, we wanted to go over so *big*.' I told him that it was just one of those crowds and that he played great. Anyone who really listened knew he was great."

Unfortunately, the hostile crowd reaction wasn't the last indignity that Vaughan and Double Trouble would suffer that night. Being booed off the stage obviously meant no encore, which also meant no jam with Graham. "We walked off stage," says Layton, "and we walked by some other band's dressing room, and there's Larry Graham going over 'Johnny B. Goode' with them! It added insult to injury."

SWISS CHEESE

However, two members of the audience were very impressed with Vaughan's playing that night. Meeting them would prove to be not only the turning point of the Switzerland trip, but arguably the most important contacts of Vaughan's entire career. The first was David Bowie: "Claude Nobs had run the Montreux Festival for many years," he recalls. "He knew I was a big R&B fan, and he thought I might enjoy this new kid. Come the show, blasting through a short but riveting set, SRV completely floored me. I probably hadn't been so gung-ho about a guitar player since seeing Jeff Beck with his band the Tridents."

Bowie and Vaughan talked after the show, and those discussions led to Vaughan playing on Bowie's huge *Let's Dance* album. SRV described the meeting in the August '83 issue of *Guitar Player*: "From what I understand, Bowie was looking for somebody who played this style anyway, and I was the one he picked. I didn't really know how it would fit in, since I hadn't heard the material and I didn't have any idea what the songs would sound like. I did know what kind of rhythm and blues David liked, because we talked about that."

The other fortuitous meeting that night involved Jackson Browne, who was so moved by Vaughan's playing that he offered to let him record for free in his studio in California. Those sessions would produce the

NILE RODGERS ON *LET'S DANCE*

BY 1982, NILE RODGERS WAS ALREADY A world-renowned guitarist and producer with platinum albums to his credit. He was doing pre-production for what would become David Bowie's landmark Let's Dance *when Bowie excitedly informed him that he wanted to use an unknown guitarist from Texas named Stevie Ray Vaughan on the upcoming sessions. —MB*

Were you in Switzerland during the Montreux Festival?

Yes, but I didn't go to the show. David did, and he said, "Man, I heard a fantastic guitar player last night!" He had never heard of him before, and Stevie's playing just blew him away.

Were you okay with the idea of using him on the record?

If David Bowie makes a suggestion, you've got to listen to it. I was curious, but because I hadn't seen the gig, I had no idea what Stevie would add. I didn't even know he was a blues player. David just told me, "I know this is going to be cool." David has an incredible history of finding unique guitar players, so I was expecting something amazing, but I didn't know what.

What did you think when Vaughan showed up?

My first impression was that Stevie was a really, really nice guy. When I finally heard him play, I'll be honest—I didn't get it. I thought he sounded so much like Albert King that I was offended. I thought, "David, if you want this trip, why don't we just call Albert King? At least people have heard of him!"

So, you didn't think it would work?

The concept was very weird at first. I mean, try to get into my frame of mind as a producer who is trying to make David Bowie hip and new and interesting. Today it's totally accepted to have a blues element on any kind of record, but in 1982, *no one* was claiming to be a blues fan. But it only took a matter of hours before I not only got it, but I was digging it and having more fun than you can imagine.

Did Vaughan track loud?

Oh, yes! He stood in the control room with us, and his amps were just *blasting*. It was the loudest thing I'd ever heard in my life. I was fine with it, though, because Stevie's sound was very soothing. It didn't make you cringe like some loud tones can.

How much direction did you give him?

Not much. We just turned the tape on and let him rip. He would find the key and just go off.

Were you looking for complete performances, or would you punch in sections?

Almost all of my work with Stevie over the years was about complete performances—there was very little punching. I didn't comp any tracks for the *Let's Dance* sessions, but for the Vaughan Brothers' *Family Style* I used a Synclavier to move performances around and Stevie loved that. He'd go out there and use the Synclavier himself, and I thought, "Oh god—what have I done?"

How do you view his place in history?

He's right up there with the best of them. No question. To come along at a time when nobody was digging the blues, and to not only make it a credible art form, but also to pave the way for so many after him—that's incredible. But even if you forget about all that and just listen to his playing, it's magical. I really miss him, man. I think about him a lot. He was a virtuoso—right up there with greats like John McLaughlin, Wes Montgomery, and Julian Bream. Stevie had the gift.

master that became SRV's debut album, *Texas Flood*.

For Layton and Shannon, the words of praise from Bowie and Browne were a welcome relief from the catcalls during their set. "It didn't surprise me at all that Bowie and Jackson Browne loved Stevie's playing," says Layton. "Stevie appreciated it, but he didn't trip on it. Any time a big star told him they liked his work, he would smile and say thanks, but in his head he was thinking, 'Wow, you like me just like that guy over there who's an auto mechanic.' Everybody who liked his playing was just as important as the next person. He was a real statesman that way."

Vaughan and Double Trouble discovered after their set that no one was scheduled to play in the basement bar at Montreux, and they jumped at the chance to get back on the horse that threw them. "We thought, 'We came to play, so let's play,'" says Layton. "Jackson Browne and his band stopped by and asked if they could jam."

"We felt a lot better by that point," adds Shannon, "and we played all night. When we left, I remember the sun coming up. It was a great jam."

HOME AGAIN

What had started out so great and then turned horrible, was now looking up again. SRV and company came home, filled once again with a mixture of nervous excitement. "There was a bunch of stuff out there on the horizon and it was really interesting," recalls Layton. "At the same time it was a little scary, because Bowie had asked Stevie to play on this much-anticipated album of his, and there was talk of Stevie doing his tour. Tommy and I were worried that maybe our band was breaking up."

Over the Thanksgiving weekend in 1982, Vaughan, Layton, and Shannon went to Browne's studio in California to lay down tracks. The next month, SRV went to New York to record *Let's Dance*. "Stevie strolled into the Power Station and proceeded to rip up everything one thought about dance records," says Bowie. "He knocked down solo upon solo, and pulled notes out of the air that no one could have dreamed would work with my songs. In a ridiculously short time, he had become midwife to the sound that had been ringing in my ears all year."

Shortly thereafter, Vaughan began rehearsing for the biggest Bowie tour of all time. He never ended up doing the tour, and the reasons behind that decision remain unclear to this day. Layton recalls the conflicting emotions that SRV was wrestling with at the time: "The Bowie tour seemed like a great break for Stevie," he says. "But there were a number of restrictions placed on him, such as having his press interviews approved and orchestrated through Bowie's people. Stevie was kind of a wild stallion, and he didn't like people trying to fence him in.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN continued

"Then there was the money issue. Stevie was getting paid on a weekly basis, with the understanding that they would do a couple of shows, then have a couple of days off. Well, Bowie's people kept adding shows, which made Stevie's weekly pay less meaningful. The money got played up as the big reason why he quit, but I think it was less important than the fact that we were on the verge of having *our* record come out, and Stevie wanted to be able to give it his all. That was what he had always wanted, and he didn't want to wait for a year to push his own record."

"Stevie was really unhappy at that point," remembers Shannon. "He told me about the rehearsals where they wanted him to come down this ramp making all these rock-star moves. He could never do it—he just walked down the ramp. The guy was so dedicated to his vision that he couldn't be false, and he wouldn't bend that rule for anyone."

Vaughan was also dedicated to his bandmates, and he offered to pay them his Bowie salary in order to keep the band together in his absence. When he quit the Bowie tour, the news was greeted with relief and admiration from Double Trouble.

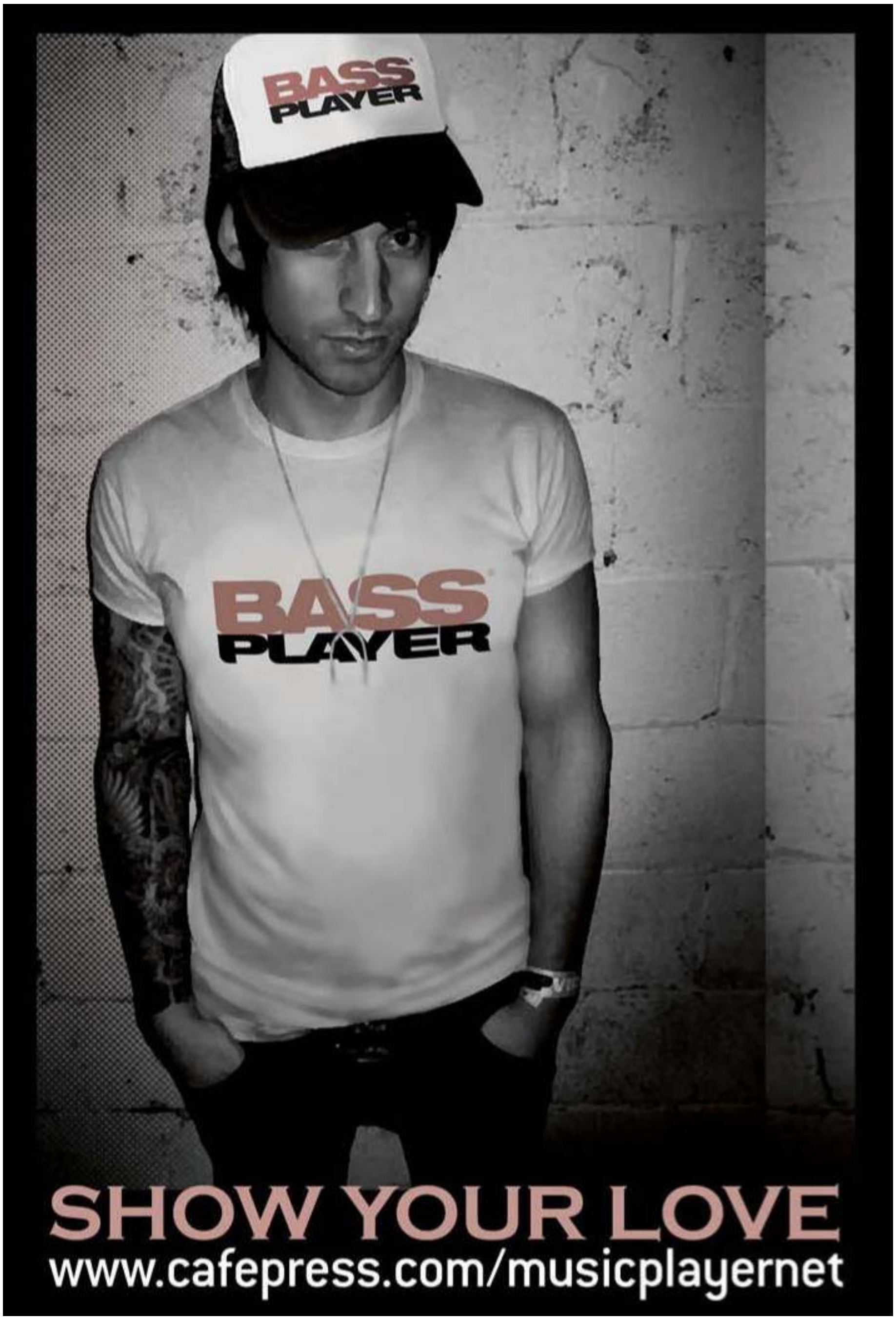
"All he said to me was, 'Man, I just couldn't do it,'" says Shannon. "I was really touched by his decision. I mean, the fact that in the midst of riding in limos and jets he could be happy to go back with us in our milk truck—that meant a lot."

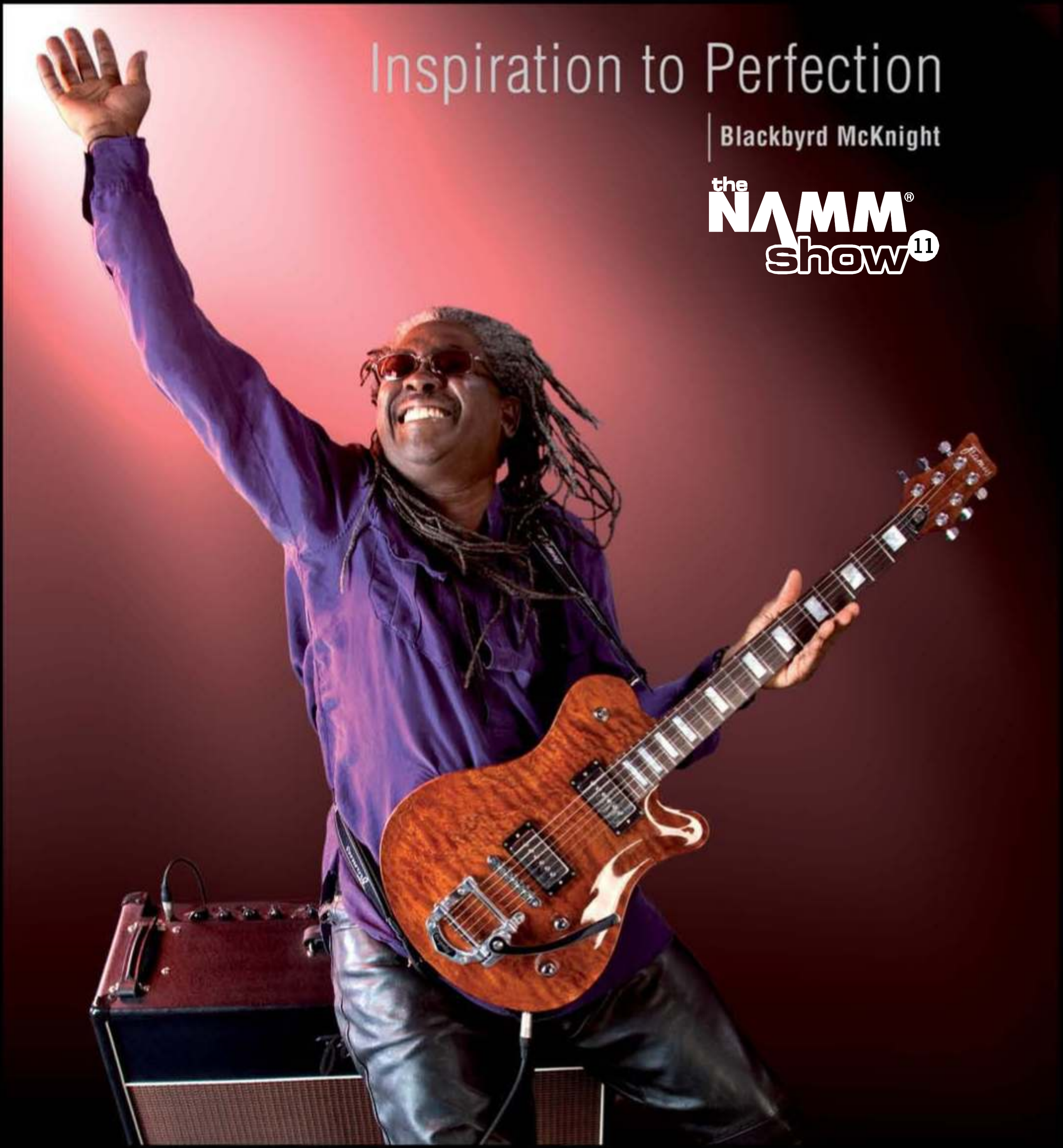
SRV never said much about his split with the Bowie camp. He summed it up to *GP* in '83 by saying, "I learned a lot working with David Bowie, but I'm glad to be back with my own band again. That was always my main concern, right from the start."

What seemed like a public relations disaster—quitting a world tour that would expose him to thousands of new fans—was once again transformed into a music-biz coup. News of Vaughan's ballsy choice to remain true to his bluesman vision spread through the guitar community and garnered him an incalculable amount of street cred.

"We had a great publicist named Charles Comer," explains Layton, "and he spun the news like, 'This skinny little white blues guitarist from Texas is *not* doing the biggest tour of a real star. Where does this nobody get off refusing this total somebody? He must have a lot of guts.' As this story's getting played up, our record and Bowie's are out at the same time and everyone's talking about how it's the same guitarist. You couldn't have *planned* it any better than it worked out on its own."

"About a month later," continues Shannon, "we were touring California in our milk truck, and we pulled up to a club and there was a line stretching around the block. We'd played there before and the place was less than half full. We saw this crowd and wondered if we had the right club! Then the record started selling like crazy, and we were on our way. It was an exciting time, but in a lot of ways I wasn't surprised. I always knew Stevie was that great—long before he was discovered."





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This lesson originally appeared in the March 2004 issue of GP.

GUY WEBSTER

Blues Guru

Five-Note Freedom

BY ROBBEN FORD

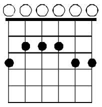
IF THERE'S ONE GENRE THAT EXTENDS to all forms of American music, it's the blues, and quite frankly, I'm astonished at how strong of a blues revival there has been in the last 20 years. My first inspiration on the guitar was a blues scale that's very basic, yet extremely useful—the open-position *E* minor pentatonic scale shown in Ex. 1. Just 13 at the time, I instantly fell in love with the scale because it gives you six open strings to jangle around with. I figured out how to use it after hearing "Baby Please Don't Go," the flipside to "Gloria" by Them, featuring Van Morrison. The song had a great guitar solo that that took place mostly in Ex. 1's open *E* minor position, and it featured exciting British Invasion-style blues licks like the ones in Ex. 2. However, as more advanced guitarists may already know, in a given key there are at least three places on the neck where you can use this pentatonic fingering to create cool riffs and melodies.

In the key of *E*, the most commonly used pentatonic scale is probably the minor pentatonic scale we just saw, a shape you can also play up an octave starting in the twelfth position [Ex. 3]. Now, move the pattern to the 9th fret and, remaining in the key of *E*, you get an *E* major pentatonic scale [Ex. 4]. This, of course, works beautifully over an *E* major chord.

Things get more interesting, though, when you try the pentatonic shape in less commonly used places on the neck. For instance, play the shape in the fourth position, and while you could call this a *G#* minor pentatonic scale [Ex. 5], in the key of *E* it becomes a very interesting major scale. Without ever hitting the root, E, all the other notes very conveniently come from the key of *E* major. You might use these notes over a very pretty *Emaj7* chord in phrases like the one in Ex. 6. This approach is really something you'll hear more often in jazz than in rock—though Jimi Hendrix probably played stuff like this on his song "May This Be Love." —*As told to Jude Gold*

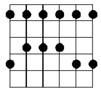
Ex. 1

E minor pentatonic scale



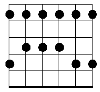
Ex. 2

E minor pentatonic scale



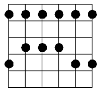
Ex. 3

E major pentatonic scale



Ex. 4

G# minor pentatonic scale

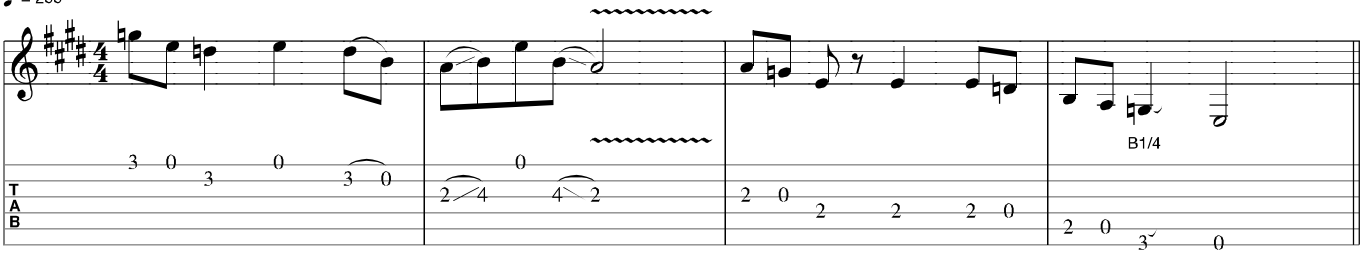


Ex. 5

Fast rock

♩ = 200

E7

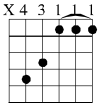


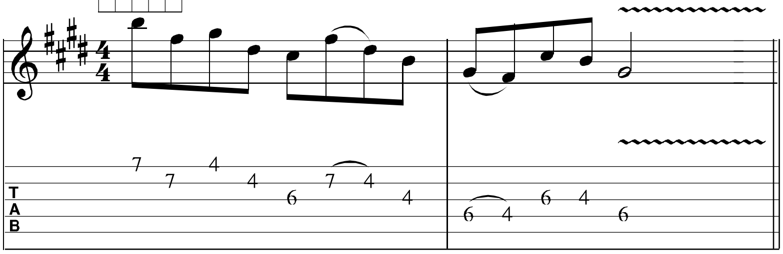
Ex. 6

Dreamy

♩ = 120

Emaj7





This lesson originally appeared in the June 2004 issue of GP.

Blues Guru

Talking Guitar

BY ROBBEN FORD

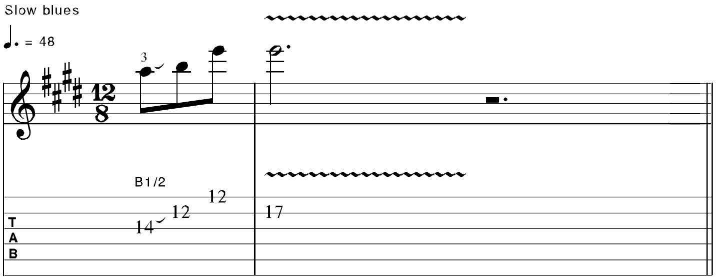
IT'S FUN TO FOCUS ON FLASHY TURNarounds, interesting fretboard patterns, and clever fingerings, but guitarists sometimes get carried away with the technical, *guitaristic* stuff and end up playing licks that don't go anywhere emotionally. What makes traditional blues such a wonderful school of music is its tremendous simplicity. Plus, blues is a storytelling music, which is another big reason why it resonates with so many people. The guitar is perfect for the blues because, in the right hands, it has a real vocal quality. If you're really connected with the notes you're playing, you can speak to people with your guitar. You can *plead* with it.

How well can you make the lick in Ex. 1 "speak"? This phrase is so simple, it doesn't allow you to think guitaristically—that is, it doesn't require you to plan ahead, preparing for your next fingering, bracing for your next big challenge, etc. It's just a molasses-slow four-note statement that is totally in the moment. Then again, there is something technically interesting about this example: The last two notes of the riff—both *E*—are identical in pitch, but, as you may have noticed, they're played on different strings (and, consequently, at different frets). I *could* have played them both at the 12th fret of the first string. But, for some reason, I feel it sounds more vocal when I leap to the 17th fret of the second string and play the repeated *E* there.

Ex. 2 is a longer phrase that also features a leap. Instead of staying in position and playing the high *E* (downbeat of the first full measure) at its more convenient location at the 12th fret of the first string, I jump up to the 17th fret of the second string and continue the riff there. These leaps are just one example of what I call physical dynamics, and they illustrate that the most expressive way of playing a lick doesn't always involve the most efficient fingering.

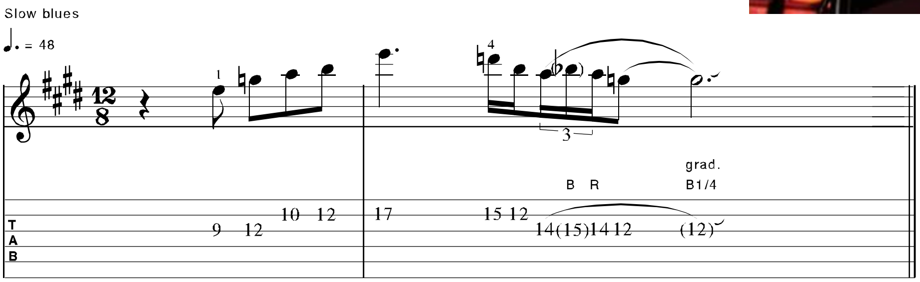
There's no one way to learn how to speak on the guitar, but one thing that really helped me in this regard was constantly performing in front of people when I hardly knew how to play. I put myself in positions where I had to come up with something to say on the instrument. Trial by fire is a one of the best ways of learning to get *inside* your notes, so that eventually, you can play with 100 percent physical and emotional involvement—which is how we should feel all the time when we're playing music. —*As told to Jude Gold*

Ex. 1



PATRICK WONG

Ex. 2



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2 KINGS

NINE MAGICAL BLUES LICKS FROM CLAPTON & KING

BY ADAM LEVY

ERIC CLAPTON AND B.B. KING—TWO OF THE MOST exciting and original guitarists to play the blues—have instantly recognizable sounds. Is this because of their tone? Their phrasing? Their touch? Yes, yes, and yes! These, and many less tangible clues, tell us who we're hearing. n Like most of us, King and Clapton started by copying their heroes. For King, the list included T-Bone Walker, Lonnie Johnson, and Blind Lemon Jefferson. Clapton was inspired by Otis Rush, Buddy Guy, and the three Kings—Freddie, B.B., and Albert. Eventually, King and Clapton transformed their

A historic meeting: King and Clapton trade licks at New York City's Cafe au Go-Go, circa '67.

This lesson originally appeared in the October 2000 issue of GP.

hero worship into the unique styles we now know and love. But how and when did the Jell-O set in its mold? The best way to answer these questions is to revisit early and mid-period recordings by King and Clapton, and observe how each guitarist spun new fabric from the threads of their forebears.

BLUES A LA KING

In the mid 1950s, King was under the spell of T-Bone Walker, who blended jazz, R&B, and jump blues into a refined, modern hybrid. Ex. 1, a hip turnaround lick, shows the kind of jazzy lines that were part of King's Walker-inspired vocabulary at the time. Note the chromatic descent from *E* to *D* in bar 1, and the descending *D* and *D♭* triad shapes in bar 2 (beats one through three). The dissonant *D♭* triad eventually works its way down to a *C* triad (the first three eighth-notes of bar 3) before outlining the tonic *G* chord with *B* and *D*—its 3 and 5.

REGAL KING

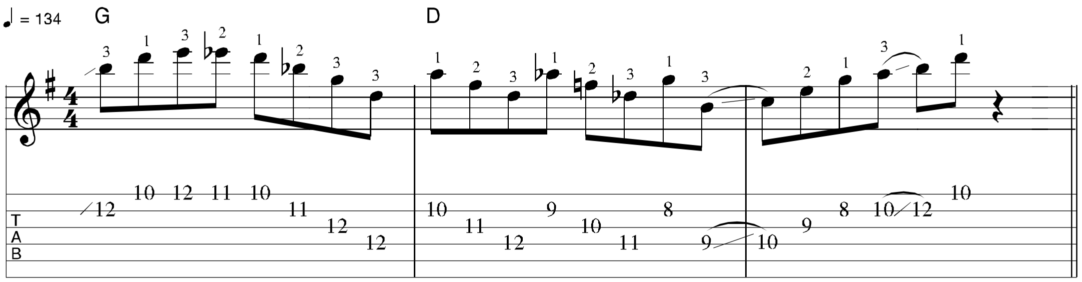
Among King enthusiasts, there is little debate that *Live at the Regal* is one of his finest works— and one of the classic live records. Recorded in 1964, the album captures King holding court at Chicago's Regal Theater, backed by a tight, six-man ensemble. We hear how he could work an audience of young fans into an ecstatic frenzy with his combination of crafty showmanship, emotive guitar, and honey-toned vocals.

One of the most precious jewels in Live at the Regal's crown is "Sweet Little Angel"—a King original and a staple of his '50s and '60s live shows. His performance is chock-full of choice licks, and Ex. 2 offers a sweet taste of slow-blues sugar. The final *G, C, G, C, C* cadence in bar 2 is a patented King move—particularly the double *C* at the end of the line, which is played on the first and second strings, respectively. You can fret the final *C* with your 3rd or 4th finger, and you can either hit the note spot on or slide into it from a half-step below for a King-sanctioned variation.

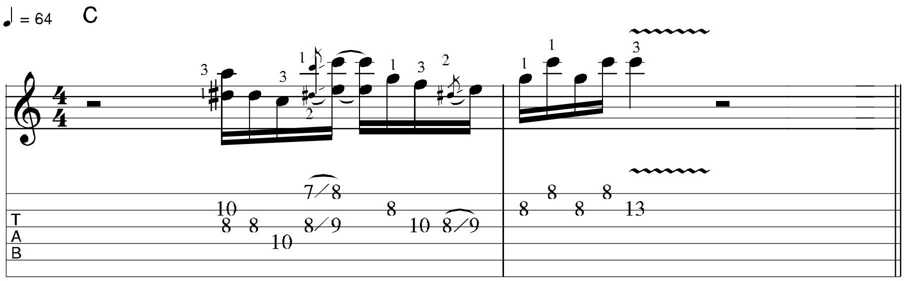
THRILLING BLUES

King followed *Live at the Regal* with a string of sparkling releases, but his next big record was 1969's *Completely Well*, which featured his career-making crossover hit, "The Thrill Is Gone." This is where we really begin to see King move beyond his '50s jump-blues roots and into his own style. Although the moody, minor-key "Thrill" contains slightly schmaltzy, overdubbed violins, most of the

Ex. 1



Ex. 2



album features a revved-up King and raw, meaty tones.

Based on some of King's *Completely Well* ideas, Ex. 3 offers a stirring route from I to IV (a progression found in the fourth and fifth bars of a typical 12-bar blues). Notice how the tension builds in bar 1 with the use of upbeats (the and of beats one and two) and a blustery hammer/ pull move (beat four). The rhythmic tension then releases in bars 2 and 3, where there is relatively little activity. Bar 2 has another kind of tension, however, as you gradually bend *B* (*and* of beat two) up to *D*. Your audience should wonder, "Wow—are you going to make it?"

LUCILLE RATTLES AND HUMS

In the '70s and early '80s, King's albums—such as *To Know You Is to Love You* and *Midnight Believer*—presented his vocals as the main attraction, and his guitar tones tended to be a little thinner and less present in the mix. But in 1988, King teamed up with U2 and producer Jimmy Iovine to record "When Love Comes to Town" on *Rattle and Hum*. This song bares the brashest tones King's fans had heard in a long while.

His lead breaks on "When Love Comes to Town" are righteous, matching U2's fiery energy blow for blow. Drawn from King's ideas, Ex. 4 demonstrates the action. This four-bar phrase begins with an attention-getting, *E* minor pentatonic burst. King brightens the minor mood by following the descending five-note run with *C#*—a note from *E* major pentatonic.

Again, King emphasizes upbeats to add tension to the melodic line. Here's how:

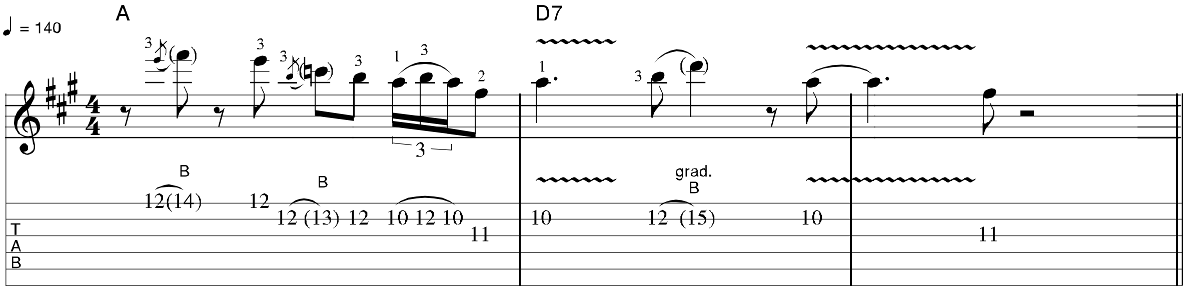
- By starting on the last eighth-note of bar 1, he anticipates the first note of bar 2.
- The *G*♮ on the *and* of beat two adds more upbeat momentum.
- The final bent *B* (*and* of beat four) finishes the bar on an upbeat.

Set between the decidedly unsyncopated bar 1 and the even more square bar 3, the upbeat-heavy bar 2 perfectly balances the phrase's overall feel. King is a master of such controlled tension, and this is one of the skills that separates the men from the boys in blues.

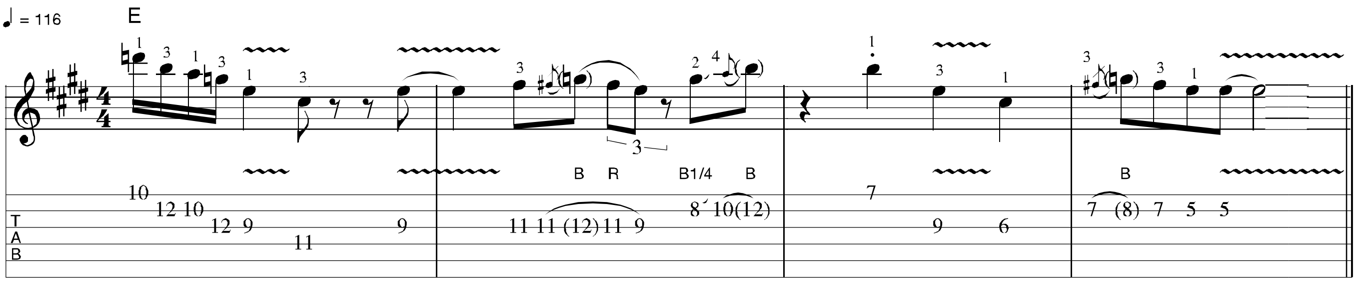
SLOWHAND'S BLUES POWER

While Eric Clapton's work in the Yardbirds is noteworthy, it wasn't until he left the birds nest and joined John Mayall's Bluesbreakers that he came into his own as a heavyweight

Ex. 3



Ex. 4



This lesson originally appeared in the October 2000 issue of GP.

blues champion. Ex.5—a I-IV-I phrase inspired by Clapton's Bluesbreaker-era lines—illustrates how the young Slowhand was already cocksure enough to take his time with a solo. Note the use of sustained notes in each bar, which give the phrase a composed—in both senses of the word—vibe. Also notice how bar 2's downbeat *D* is set up by a descending triplet (*C♮*, *A*, *E*) on beat four of bar 1, and how bar 3's *A7* is anticipated by bar 2's two final notes (*C♯*, *A*). Such anticipations can really help keep a solo rolling. (For a more detailed exploration of Clapton's Bluesbreakers-era handiwork, check out Jesse Gress' transcription of Clapton's "Little Girl" solo—from Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton—in the Sept. '00 *GP*.)

HEAVY CREAM

After leaving the Bluesbreakers in July 1966, Clapton formed Cream with drummer Ginger Baker and bassist Jack Bruce. While the guitarist's musical heart and soul still belonged to the blues, Baker and Bruce shared a penchant for a wild, polyrhythmic, electrified breed of jazz. The fusion of these elements made Cream unique, and gave Clapton a new context in which to work his blues mojo.

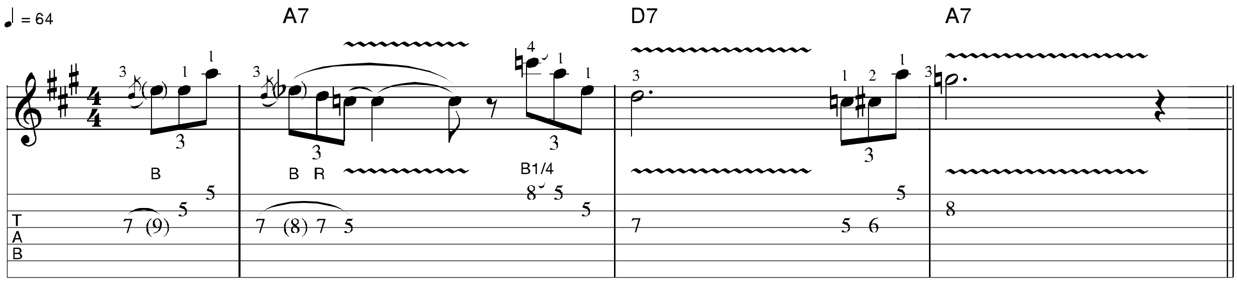
There are several old-school blues numbers on *Fresh Cream*—the band's 1966 debut—including Willie Dixon's "Spoonful" and Skip James' "I'm So Glad." But ironically, the record's most down and dirty cut is the Bruce original, "Sleepy Time Time." The slow, 12-bar blues offers a golden opportunity for Clapton to burn, and he does just that. Ex. 6 is a I-IV-I-V7 turnaround lick in the spirit of E.C.'s "Sleepy Time Time" moves.

STRANGE BLUE

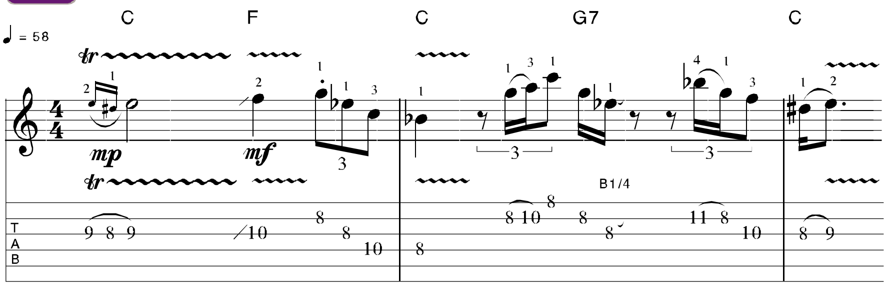
Disraeli Gears, the follow-up to *Fresh Cream*, found the band stepping into psychedelic territory, with more adventurous songwriting and wilder tones—including Clapton's first recorded use of a wah pedal. Still, his blues roots were as evident as ever on such cuts as "Strange Brew" (on which E.C. borrows liberally from Albert King's "Oh, Pretty Woman" solo) and "Sunshine of Your Love." Of course, a big part of Clapton's magic is that even when he cops licks from other players, he adapts the phrasing and dynamics to make the lines his own. (As Clapton admitted in the July '95 *GP*: "I'll start with a Freddie King line and then go to a B.B. King line. I'll do something to join them up, so that part will be me.")

Derived from Clapton's "Strange Brew" solo, Ex. 7 shows an archetypal Slowhand move in which you deftly pivot between the eighth-position and fifth-position A minor pentatonic boxes. The pivot point is the third-string slide down from the 9th fret to 7th fret (bar 2, beat three). Simply reverse the maneuver to shift back up (bar 3, *and* of beat four).

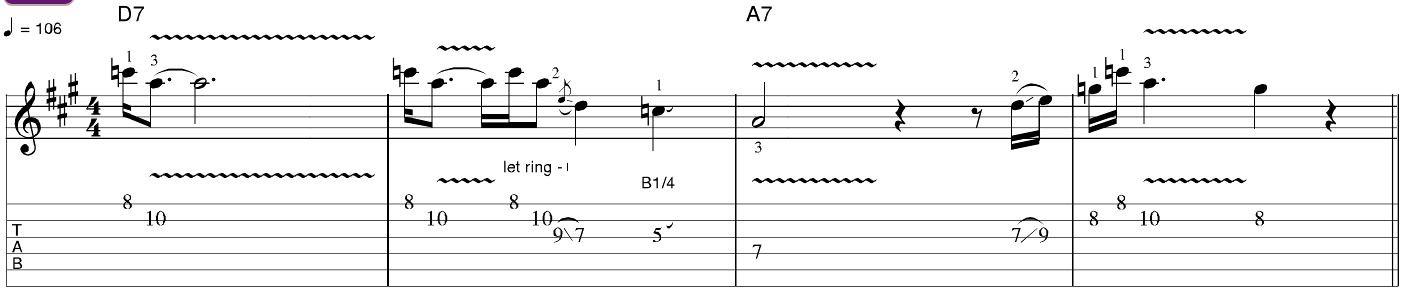
Ex. 5

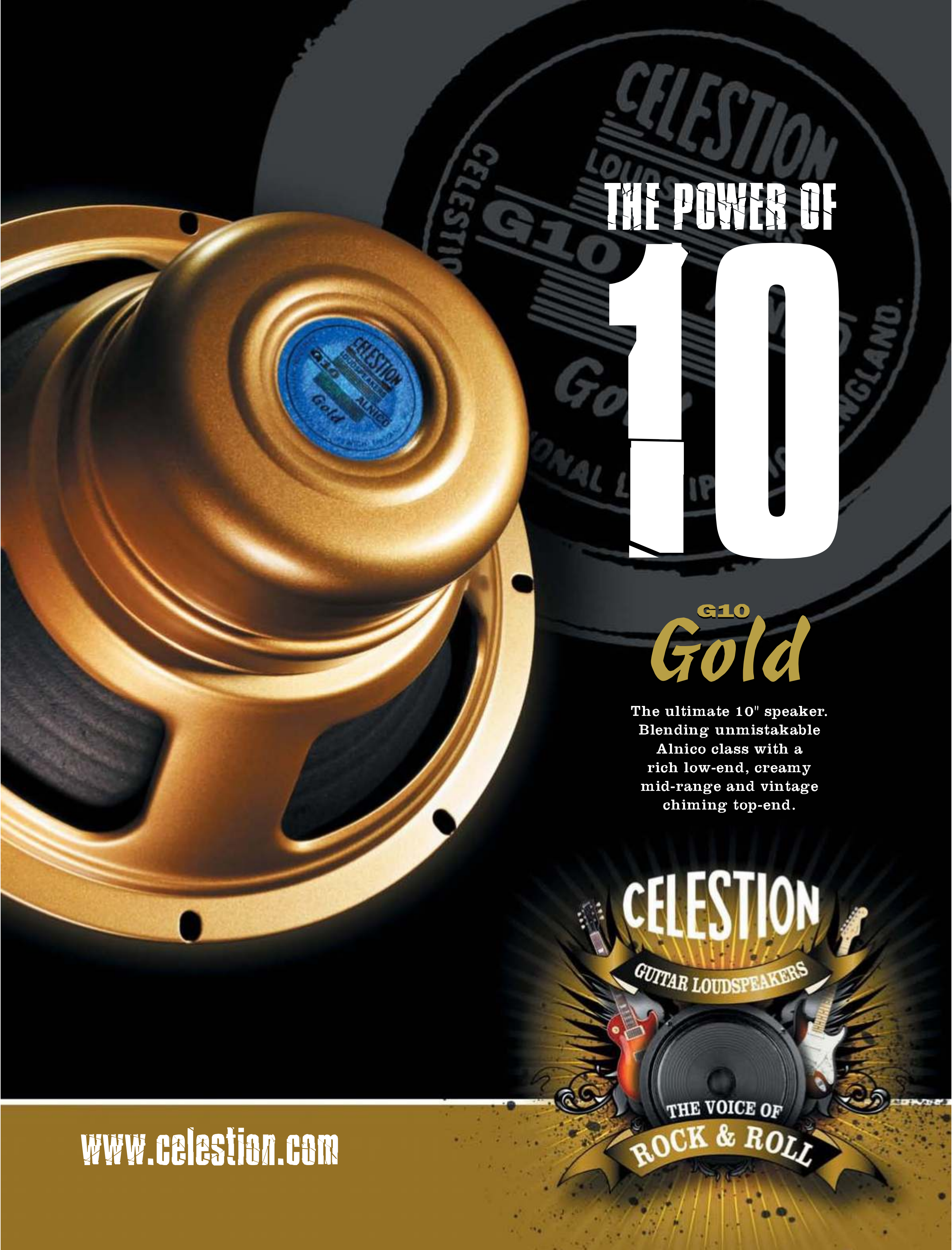


Ex. 6



Ex. 7

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BELL BOTTOM BLUES

In 1970, Clapton rode yet another musical wave with Derek and the Dominos. Recruiting bottleneck ace Duane Allman, Clapton created the masterpiece Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs with songs such as "Layla," "Bell Bottom Blues, " and "Why Does Love Got to Be So Sad?" Layla showed a mellower side of Clapton, and the songs had little to do with the blues. But even without a 12-bar, I-IV-V backdrop, Slowhand couldn't help but imbue his lines with a sad soulfulness. Ex. 8, an *A* minor pentatonic lick evocative of Clapton's Layla-era playing, suggests this reflective side. The faux pedal-steel move (bar 1, beat three) plays up the lick's slightly country flavor. Make sure to hold the bent *E* (*and* of beat two) when you strike the high *G*, so that you have, in effect, a released bend on the second sixteenth-note of beat three.

ROCKING THE CRADLE

With such records as *461 Ocean Boulevard*, *Another Ticket*, *Money and Cigarettes*, and *Behind the Sun*, Clapton spent much of the late 1970s and '80s positioning himself as a singer and songwriter, and it seemed he had hung up his "guitar hero" hat for good. But in 1994, Clapton released *From the Cradle*—a collection of classic tunes by Lowell Fulson, Willie Dixon, Muddy Waters, Elmore James, and Freddie King. The record is much more than a salutary gesture to Clapton's ancestors—it's a full-blown bluesfest, with riveting vocal performances and some of the baddest guitar he has ever recorded.

Ex. 9 is in the same mood as Clapton's soloing on some of Cradle's slow blues tracks, such as "Third Degree," "Reconsider Baby," and "Someday After a While." With its opening triplet, this phrase is a variation of one of the prime blues licks of all time. The lick is generally attributed to T-Bone Walker, who used it on his early-'40s recording of "Stormy Monday." It's hard to overstate Walker's impact on blues guitarists. As B.B. King himself explained in the Mar. '75 *GP*, "I can still hear T-Bone in my mind today from that first record I heard—'Stormy Monday.' He was the first electric guitar player I heard on record. He made me know I just had to go out and get an electric guitar." For a jazzy, Walker-esque twist, replace the b3 (*B♭*, first string, 6th fret), with the 9 (*A*, a half-step lower, at the 5th fret).

The lick works nicely as an intro or turnaround, and can be very effective in bars 6 and 7 of a 12-bar blues in *G*—in which case, the chords would be *C* (or *C7*) for the first bar of the lick, and *G* (or *G7*) for the second bar. Here's why this lick sits so nicely at that point in a 12-bar progression: The Bbs reference *C7* (they're the chord's ♭7) and the *B♮*s harmonize with *G* or *G7* (they're the ♮3).

BEYOND THE CROSSROADS

"There's nothing wrong with trying to play like someone—in the beginning. But then as you learn, you start to think that there's already one of them. So you try to play as you play," counseled King in the Sept. '93 *GP*. In other words, once you've got these King- and Clapton-style licks under your belt, it's your duty to make them your own. How? Try these tips for extra-credit blues homework:

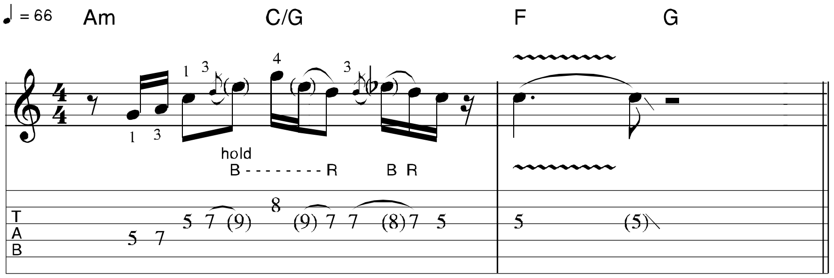
• Using each of these phrases as a template, craft new licks by slightly varying the rhythms and note choices. Each lick can spawn scores of variations.

• The tempo markings are given to indicate the tempo at which Clapton or King might play each respective lick, but you can personalize these lines by trying them at a variety of tempos—from dirge to walking pace to sprint.

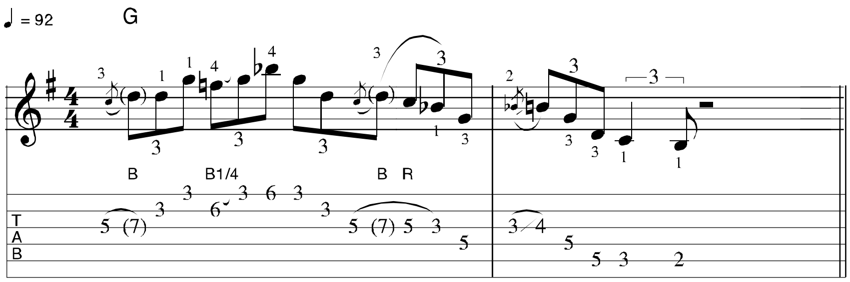
• Try playing some of these licks an octave higher or lower than written. Recasting them up or down an octave can give them a new spin, while keeping their musical conception intact. (And while you're at it, try transposing them to other keys. Sometimes just moving a lick up or down a few frets lets you hear it from a different perspective.)

• Listen to recordings of King and Clapton without trying to dissect their lines note for note. Try to tune into the essence of their phrases without literally walking in the kings' footsteps.

Ex. 8



Ex. 9



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Blues Guru

Snappy, Sliding Double Bends

BY ROBBEN FORD

USING YOUR FINGERS TO SOUND NOTES instead of a pick is a very expressive mode of playing, because there are a thousand different ways to pluck a note. You can gently pluck notes with the pad of your finger or thumb for a softer texture. Or, you can get a sharper sound by plucking the string with your fingernail. I love snapping notes—literally pulling strings away from the body of the guitar until they snap back against the frets. It's a very emotive, physical way of playing.

Try snapping some notes over the I chord in a slow 12/8 blues in the key of C, as shown in Ex. 1. Remember that p = thumb, i = index finger, and m = middle finger. Snap every note except those plucked by the thumb. In the second measure, a two-note grip—*E♭* and *G*—is snapped with both index and middle fingers. For extra emotion, bend both notes in these diads up a quarter-step or more immediately after plucking them.

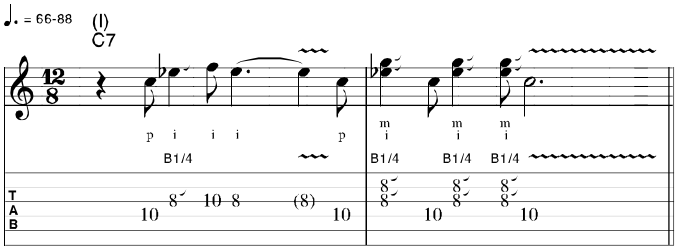
Ex. 2 shows how I might snap a diad, bend its notes up a quarter-step, and then slide it up the neck a few frets, as shown in the first half of the phrase's first bar. On beat four of the same measure, I play the same two notes but slide them down the neck for a similar vibe. This lick is a good introduction to Ex. 3, which demonstrates what is perhaps my favorite type of double bending—melodic double bending. The first two-note grip—which contains *E♭* and *G♭*—is arguably outside our key of C major. But if you simultaneously bend them each up a half-step as indicated, they become *E* and *G* and fit the I chord, *C7*, perfectly. You're harmonically leaning into the chord, which is often a wonderfully bluesy sound.

Follow that double bend with some upward slides as shown (so it becomes a *G♭-B♭♭* diad), then bend both notes up a half-step, and once again, a dissonant interval suddenly seems to magically "tune up" against the background chord. As shown on beat four of this example's opening measure, the process works in reverse, too.

You can use these sliding double bends in your lead playing, of course, but they also sound great as little comping licks. Ex. 4 presents another bendy accompaniment you can try over that spot in a *C* blues where the IV chord, *F7*, resolves back to the I, *C7*. What's cool about this lick is that it sounds like it involves several double bends, but really, throughout the riff, the notes on the first string are held stationary. Only notes on the second string are bent—but to quite a dramatic effect! —*As told to Jude Gold*

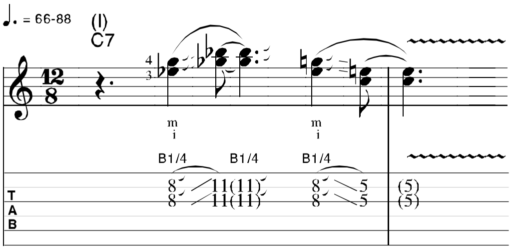
Ex. 1

Spicy



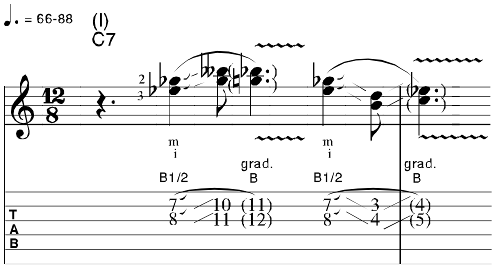
Ex. 2

Tasty



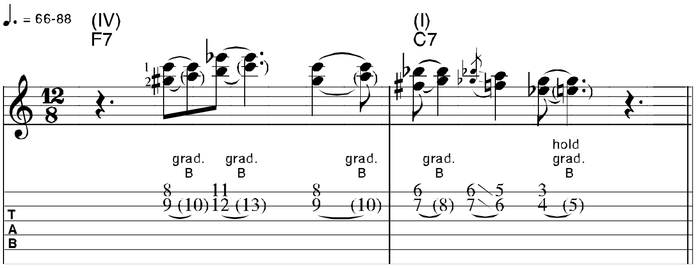
Ex. 3

Saucy



Ex. 4

Meaty



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This lesson originally appeared in the October 2004 issue of

Blues Guru

That Cool Four-Against-Three Sound

BY ROBBEN FORD

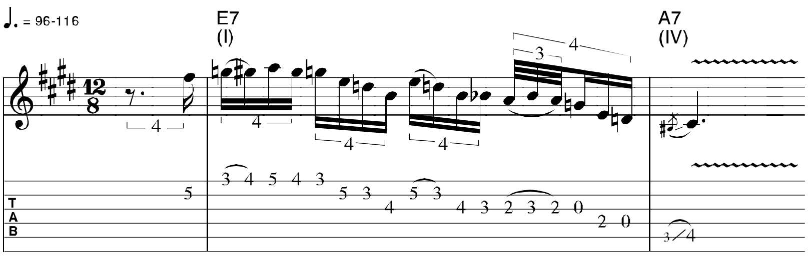
STEVE JENNINGS

THE BLUES OFTEN HAS A TRIPLET—SOME would say *shuffle*—feel that we typically write out as 12/8 or 6/8 meter, which indicates three pulses per downbeat. But many musicians, from bebop horn players to blues guitarists, like to occasionally put *four* pulses in the space of those three—that is, play straight sixteenth-notes over the underlying triple feel. Here's a nice lick that just popped into my head that demonstrates exactly what I'm talking about [Ex. 1]. Try going into it after playing in a typical shuffle feel for a while. If anything, it's the "shifting gears" from the triplet rhythm into the straight 4/4 feel that sounds so refreshing—not to mention the fact that because this lick contains both G♮ and G♯ [beat one, bar 1] it's nicely ambiguous. It could be considered to be in either *E* minor or *E* major. The phrase comes alive when it's played at the tempo indicated—in other words, fairly fast. Like many licks, it just doesn't sound right if it's played too slow or too fast.

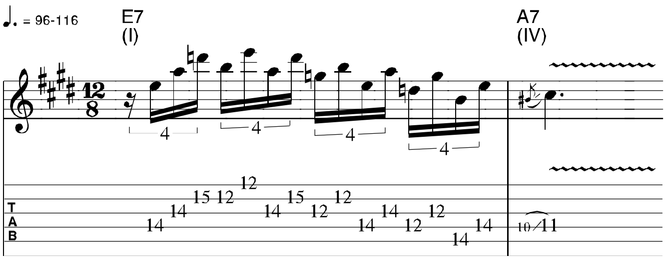
While playing in this four-against-three feel, I sometimes play patterns such as Ex. 2, which brings out some of the perfect-fourth intervals that occur naturally in the E pentatonic scale, such as the *E-A*, *A-D*, *B-E*, and *D-G* intervals shown. As demonstrated in Ex 3, I'll even get a whole-tone sound by playing fourths that descend down the pentatonic scale until, starting with *C*♮ [second pulse in beat three, bar 1], the pattern naturally starts taking me down the *E* whole-tone scale for an interesting flavor.

There's nothing wrong with playing patterns, and they're great for adding variety to your playing, but truthfully, I rarely use them anymore. They're simply not that *vocal*, and, therefore, don't always serve the blues. I might save licks like the last two examples for a different context. Patterns may be most useful for learning the fretboard and building up dexterity. I used to play more pattern-based stuff, but my whole approach—my whole journey as a blues player—is to keep things musical, raw, simple, and emotional. Those things are the basic ingredients of the blues. —*As told to Jude Gold.*

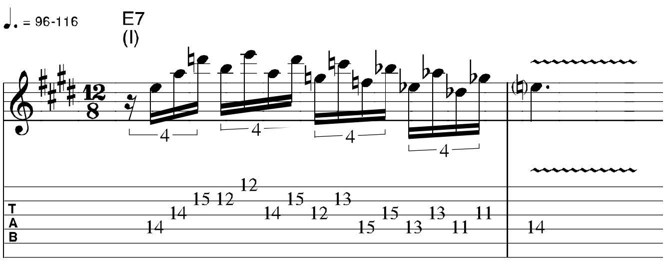
Ex. 1



Ex. 2



Ex. 3



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One little thing you can do to make things

Rock Guru

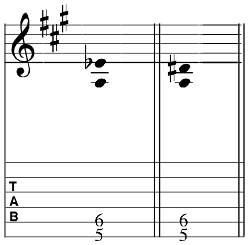
Devilish Blues Riffs

BY GREG KOCH

IT WAS IN THE RECENT DECEMBER issue of *GP* that I introduced you to the so-called "devil's interval," the interval better known in modern times as the *tritone*. People often think of the tritone as the flatted 5—which, above the root, A, is created by adding *E♭* [Ex. 1a]. Of course, you'll often see this tritone spelled enharmonically using *D♯* [Ex. 1b], which only means that the notation is different, while the sound and fingering remain exactly the same. But, since I was a blues pig as a youth, it's only natural that my treatise on the tritone continues with some exciting

Ex. 1a Ex. 1b

Freely



This lesson originally appeared in the February 2005 issue of GP.

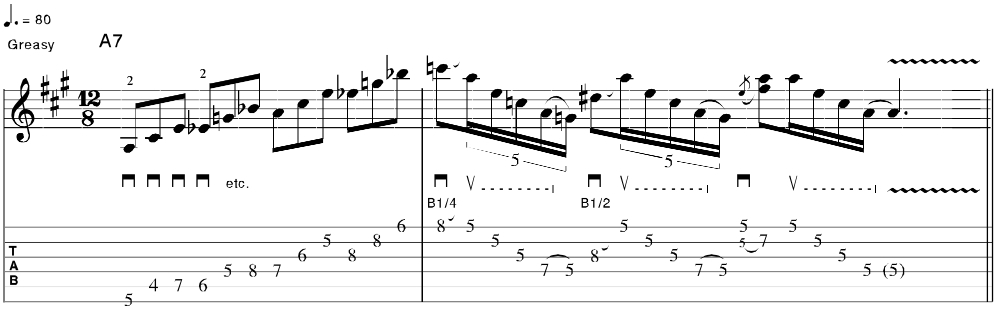
ways to incorporate that unmistakable tritone flavor into single-note lead guitar licks.

Let's say you're playing over a bluesy 12/8 groove in our friendly neighborhood key of *A*. One little thing you can do to make things more interesting is play spicy lines such as Ex. 2, which I may have ripped off, at least partially, from the great Mike Stern. The tritone action of note takes place in the first bar, where major triads built on the root, *A*, (beats one and three) alternate between major triads built on the tritone, *E♭*. The lick concludes with bar 2, where saucy maneuvers involving upward sweeps of the pick ultimately land you on the root, *A*.

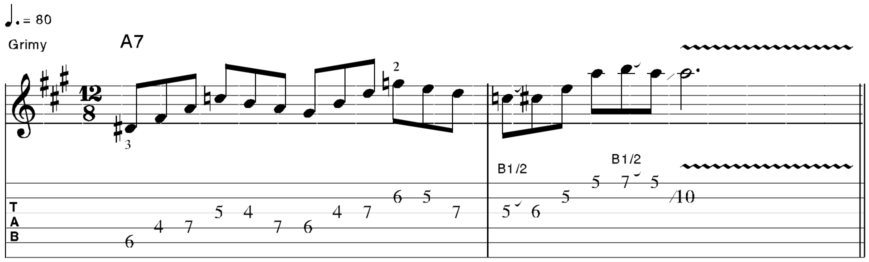
You can also *start* your phrase on the tritone, as shown in Ex. 3. If you hear some bebop-inspired turns of phrase in this snaky example, well, you have trained ears, because watch what happens if we switch gears and play the same exact notes—or at least the first 12 pitches—as swung eighth-notes in 4/4 time. As proves Ex. 4, the notes seem to effortlessly imply a swingin' II-V-I chord progression in *A*. No, the gristly riffs in this lesson aren't on any of my records. They're just random excerpts of a troubling morning here at the Koch residence, sitting in a kitchen full of dirty dishes. *—As told to Jude Gold*

Peruse Greg Koch's impressive portfolio of albums, books, and instructional videos on the Web at gregkoch.com.

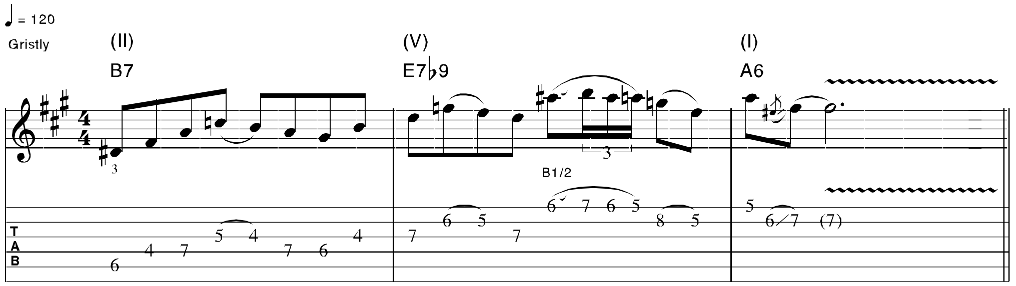
Ex. 2



Ex. 3



Ex. 4



Lessons

This lesson originally appeared in the January 2005 issue of GP.

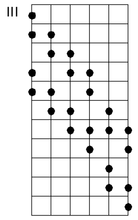
Blues Guru

Simple Secrets of the Symmetrical Scale BY ROBBEN FORD

PROBABLY NO OTHER SCALE SOUNDS weirder the first time you hear it than the whole/half scale—or symmetrical scale, as it's often called. It is a truly strange sounding group of notes that usually makes little sense until you realize how useful it is for tagging the defining tones in an extended V-I chord resolution. For example, when you want to bring out, say, the 3, ♭7, 13, and ♭9 of the V chord in a V13♭9-I progression, no other scale does the job more conveniently.

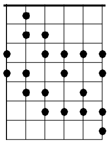
Ex. 1

G half/whole symmetrical scale



Ex. 2

G half/whole symmetrical scale



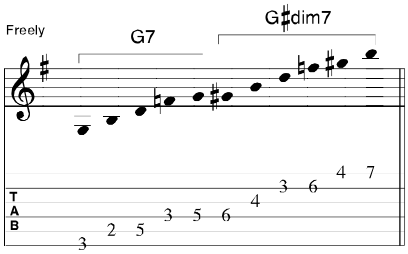
But, in blues, I've found a much simpler use for the scale—an approach that involves playing over the tonic (the I chord). To see what I mean, first make sure you know some symmetrical scale fingerings. Start with the four-note-per-string fingering in Ex. 1, which we'll call "half/whole" because we happen to be starting with a half-step. Notice how it's composed entirely of alternating half- and whole-steps (and therefore is one of only two such scales in all of Western music). While this fingering clearly demonstrates the symmetrical nature of the scale, I am often drawn to fingerings such as Ex. 2, perhaps because they usually stay in one position.

When I first experimented with this scale, I was surprised to discover the different arpeggios that were hiding within it. Of course, there are many diminished arpeggios you can pull out of the scale, because, like diminished chords, the symmetrical scale is based on stacked minor thirds. But do you also see, for instance, a dominant-7 arpeggio tucked in there too?

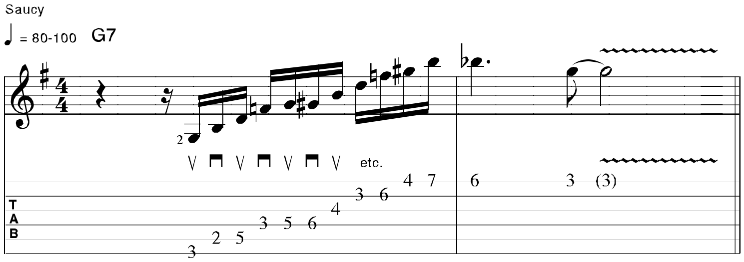
Using Ex. 2's fingering, it's easy to play a G7 arpeggio followed by a G♯dim7 arpeggio, as in Ex. 3. These two groups of notes sound a bit clinical on their own but can be very expressive when you get command of them. In a G blues, you might hear me use them in a biting phrase like Ex. 4.

A great thing about the symmetrical scale's stacked minor thirds is that they allow you to invert licks and chords very easily. Any lick you create using the scale will probably sound just as cool—but totally different—played a minor third higher up the neck. Check out the riff in the first bar of Ex. 5. Once you've learned it, simply move your fretting hand up a minor third and play the lick again in the bar 2, and then up another minor third in bar 3. Each new version of the phrase tags different scale tones, yet still somehow sounds great over a G7 groove. Also, try the lick's final inversion [not shown], which starts at the 14th fret of the fourth string. —*As told to Jude Gold*

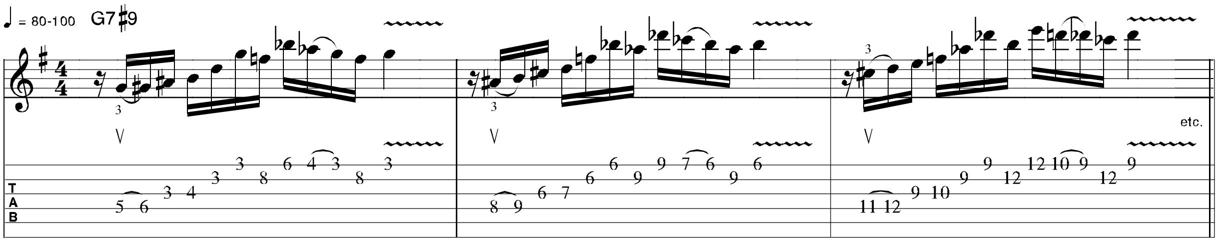
Ex. 3



Ex. 4



Ex. 5



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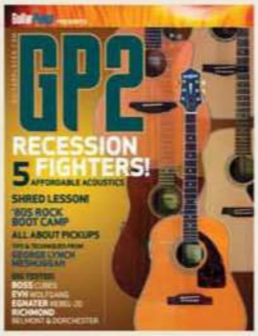

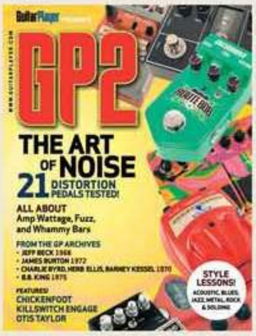

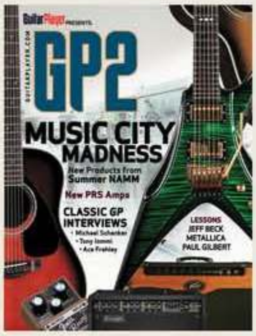

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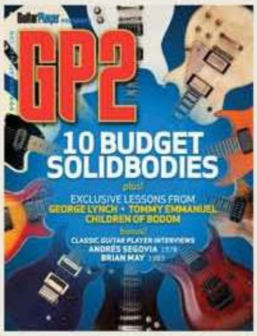

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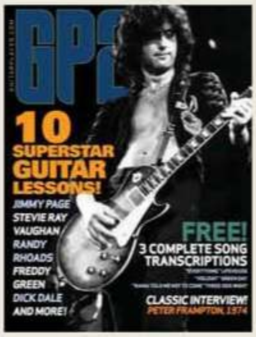

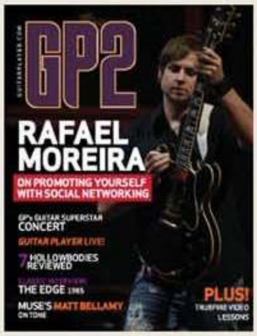

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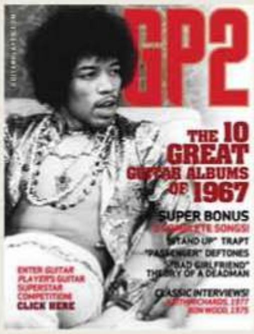

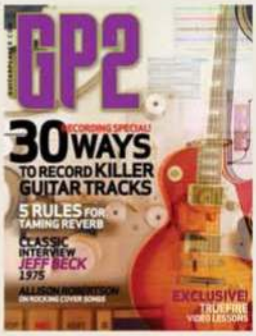

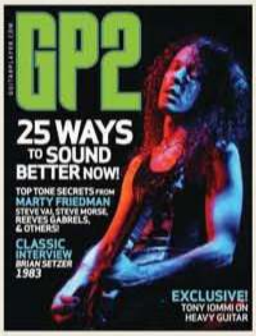

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